

# Open Research Online

---

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

## Outcasts On The Inside? A Case Study Of The Career Aspirations And Experiences Of Widening Participation Students From A Merseyside College Of Higher Education

Thesis

How to cite:

Redmond, Paul M. (2005). Outcasts On The Inside? A Case Study Of The Career Aspirations And Experiences Of Widening Participation Students From A Merseyside College Of Higher Education. EdD thesis The Open University.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2004 The Author



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.0000c018>

---

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

---

[oro.open.ac.uk](http://oro.open.ac.uk)

**DOCTOR IN EDUCATION**

# **Outcasts on the Inside?**

**A case study of the career aspirations and  
experiences of widening participation  
students from a Merseyside college of  
higher education**

**Paul M. Redmond**

**P5879598**

**Date of Submission: December 2004**

**PAGE  
NUMBERING  
AS ORIGINAL**

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The National Context of the Research .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Research Sample and Foci .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Why a Focus on Careers? .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Defining 'widening participation'.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Widening participation at Liverpool Hope .....</b>	<b>13</b>
Reach Out.....	14
Issues of retention .....	15
<b>Widening participation and Careers Services.....</b>	<b>17</b>
The 'Harris Review' .....	20
<b>The careers service at Liverpool Hope .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Merseyside: social and economic context .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Socio-economic classification.....	24
Education, Employment and Skills .....	25
<b>Advance Organiser for the Thesis.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Factors motivating widening participation students to enrol in higher education .....</b>	<b>29</b>
Participation and Non-Participation .....	29
From Access to H.E. ....	32
Impact of local communities .....	35
Participation and social class .....	36
<b>Widening participation students in H.E. their experiences, insights and aspirations .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Documenting the trends.....	38
Recording the experiences of widening participation students .....	39
Fragmented identities: work, home and higher education.....	41
<b>Implications for careers services .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Literature related to the Conceptual Framework .....</b>	<b>45</b>
Career Theory.....	45
Brown and Scase Career Orientations Model .....	48
<b>Literature relating to Bourdieu .....</b>	<b>54</b>
Habitus.....	55
'Field' .....	58
Cultural Capital .....	59
Careership: 'Pragmatic Rational Decisions', 'Turning Points' and 'Horizons for Action' .....	61
Positioning Theory .....	63



<b>CHAPTER 3: THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>The research issues .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>My Philosophy of Research .....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>3.2. The Research methodology .....</b>	<b>69</b>
A Qualitative Research strategy .....	70
Ethnography .....	71
Case study .....	72
Triangulation of Data .....	73
<b>The Research Methods .....</b>	<b>74</b>
Questionnaire .....	74
Focus groups .....	77
On-Course Interviews .....	78
Tracer Interviews .....	79
<b>Chronology .....</b>	<b>80</b>
Post Questionnaire Student participation .....	81
<b>The Analysis of data .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>84</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 4: THE ANALYSIS OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA .....</b>	 <b>85</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>The Focus Group Transcript .....</b>	<b>85</b>
Reasons for enrolling .....	87
Experiences in higher education .....	89
Career aspirations and relationship with the Institution and careers service .....	94
<b>Analysis of a tracer interview transcript .....</b>	<b>97</b>
Reflections on higher education .....	99
Experiences in higher education .....	101
Reflections on career aspirations: aspirations versus realities .....	103
 <b>CHAPTER 5: 'OUTCASTS' OR 'LUCKY SURVIVORS'? .....</b>	 <b>105</b>
<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Student Profiles .....</b>	<b>106</b>
Background information .....	107
'Career orientations' model .....	107
Format of the student profiles .....	108
<b>SUSAN .....</b>	<b>109</b>
Reasons for enrolment .....	110
Experiences in higher education .....	111
Career aspirations .....	114
Conclusion .....	116
<b>JILL .....</b>	<b>117</b>
Reasons for enrolling .....	120
Experiences in higher education .....	122
Career aspirations .....	123
Conclusion .....	126
<b>PETER .....</b>	<b>126</b>
Reasons for enrolment .....	126

Experiences in higher education .....	128
Career aspirations .....	130
Conclusion .....	132
<b>ALISON .....</b>	<b>133</b>
Reasons for enrolment .....	135
Experiences in higher education .....	136
Aspirations and orientations .....	137
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>141</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 6: 'WASH 'N GO': WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....</b>	 <b>142</b>
<b>Motivations for enrolling .....</b>	<b>142</b>
<b>The relevance of 'turning points' .....</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Habitus and student views on higher education .....</b>	<b>149</b>
<b>Tensions at home .....</b>	<b>152</b>
<b>Pragmatic rational decision-making .....</b>	<b>154</b>
<b>Conclusion: The 'Wash 'n' Go' Students .....</b>	<b>156</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 7: 'ECONOMIES OF EXPERIENCE': WIDENING PARTICIPATION STUDENTS AND THE WORLD OF WORK .....</b>	 <b>158</b>
<b>'The Credential Nexus' .....</b>	<b>158</b>
<b>The changing importance of cultural capital.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>Social Class ambivalence and 'Imputations of superiority' .....</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Work aspirations and 'realities' .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Students' career aspirations .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>Orientations to Work .....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>'Career orientations' at Liverpool Hope .....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>Extending the Typology: Identification of sub-orientations .....</b>	<b>172</b>
'Those who can, teach' .....	173
Use of the careers service .....	175
Aspirations versus realities .....	177
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>178</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 8: REVIEW AND REFLECTIONS .....</b>	 <b>179</b>
<b>Review of initial issues .....</b>	<b>179</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>180</b>
Sampling .....	180
Methods .....	181
<b>Widening participation students .....</b>	<b>182</b>

<b>Implications .....</b>	<b>184</b>
Implications for careers services .....	184
Implications for Liverpool Hope .....	187
Implications for the sector.....	188
<b>Limitations of the research .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>Desirable future research .....</b>	<b>190</b>
<b>Personal reflections of the research process .....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>Final summary: Outcasts on the Inside?.....</b>	<b>192</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>194</b>
<b>Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>195</b>
<b>Appendix 2: Student Survey Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>197</b>
<b>Appendix 3: Tracer Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>200</b>
<b>Appendix 4: Summary of Questionnaire Data.....</b>	<b>201</b>
<b>Appendix 5: Focus Group Transcript.....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>Appendix 6: Focus Group Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>224</b>
<b>Appendix 7: Tracer Interview Transcript .....</b>	<b>226</b>
<b>Appendix 8: Student Participation Table .....</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>237</b>



**Tables and Figures**

Table 1.1: Top 10 UK HE institutions with the highest non-completion rates. .... 16

Table 1.2. University performance indicators: Full-time courses, 2001 – 02 ..... 17

Table 1. 3: Average staffing levels in UK higher education careers services' (by job role) ..... 18

Table 1.4. Careers service provision at Liverpool Hope .....22

Table 1.5. Regional earnings by gender .....24

Table 1.6: Summary of Merseyside 'blue and 'white' social class .....25

Table 1.7. Skill levels (% of working age population, 2001).....26

Table 2.1: Categories of Widening Participation .....31

Table 2.2.The new vocabulary of graduate employment.....48

Table 2.3. Changing organizational paradigms .....49

Table 2.4. Student Orientations to Work.....51

Figure 3.1. Relationship between conceptual framework, methodology and issues73

Table 3.2. Questionnaire design matrix ..... 75

Table 3.3. Research chronology ..... 80

Diagram 3. 4. From Research Questions to Empirical and Case Reports ..... 83

Table 4.1 Biographical data relating to Focus Group IV participants..... 86

Diagram 4.2. Focus Group IV: Category formation..... 87

Table 4.3. Frequency with which certain terms were used in the focus group ..... 97

Diagram 4.4. Analysis of tracer interview ..... 98

Table 5.1. Distribution of career orientations among student profiles..... 108

Table 6.1 Motivations for enrolling in higher education..... 143

Table 6.2 Motivations for enrolment by Cluster ..... 144

Table 6.3.: Distribution of access students by subject and qualifications (2002-03)  
..... 156

Figure 7.1.The social construction of personal capital..... 161

Table 7.2 Students' aspirations compared to recorded destinations ..... 165

Table 7.3. Career orientations among final year students ..... 168

Diagram 7.4. Revised career orientations model..... 171

Figure 8.1. Charting the relationship between the research issues ..... 180

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to a number of people who, during the three years it took to write this thesis, provided me with lots of support and encouragement to turn what began as a fuzzy idea into a fascinating journey of learning and discovery.

First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Neil Moreland. Throughout the three years in which this study took place, Neil's knowledge of his subject, his passion for widening participation, and his critical capacity as a tutor – to say nothing of his peerless editorial skills – have been for me, a constant source of inspiration.

Second, I would like to thank the students who participated in this study and who, through their courage and irrepressible good humour epitomised for me the meaning of the word *hope*. I would also like to express my thanks to my colleagues in Career Development, to the Rector, Professor Gerald Pillay, Professor Bill Chambers, Professor Simon Lee, Bishop Ian Stuart and Dr Ian Vandewalle.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Samantha, for her patience, wisdom, tolerance (in the face of mountains of books and papers), and love.

To her, this thesis is dedicated.

# Chapter 1: Context of the Research

**'The education system excludes as it always has, but now it does so continuously and at every level of the curriculum ... and it keeps hold of those whom it excludes, just relegating them to educational tracks that have lost more or less of whatever value they once had. It follows that these outcasts on the inside are forced, as a function of the fluctuations and oscillations of the system and its sanctions, to do a balancing act between enraptured adherence to the illusions the system proposes and resignation to its decrees, between anxious submission and powerless revolt'.**

**Pierre Bourdieu, *'The Weight of the World'* (1999, p.425).**

## **Introduction**

**Whilst the above quotation from Pierre Bourdieu was not discovered until I was in the writing-up phase of my research, it sufficiently resonated with my findings to provide the title of the thesis. Although there are already many studies about the experiences of adult widening participation students in higher education (see for example: Ball et al., 2002, Reay et al., 2002, Tett, 1999, Osborne et al., 2004), the uniqueness of this study is based upon three factors.**

**Firstly, the study is of adult widening participation students in Merseyside, England. Nationally, the economic contribution made by higher education to the economy and the provision of a skilled, adaptable workforce, is a major topic of concern, and even more so in regions such as Merseyside in the North West of England, which have experienced long-term structural economic problems and recession (LSC, 2003). Consequently, it is likely that appeals to the vocational benefits of higher education are less likely to be accepted by widening participation students in Merseyside, especially if their 'horizons of action' are local rather than cosmopolitan. Social, structural and economic factors, therefore, are considered to be an important context to this thesis.**

**Secondly, the research is unique in that it included a number of tracer interviews with widening participation students six months after their**



graduation. By doing this, the research sought to utilise their subsequent vantage point to gain an understanding of their perspectives upon work, higher education and the role and potential of university-based careers education. This was particularly central to me as the researcher as I currently am in charge of careers education and guidance at Liverpool Hope University College, the Merseyside Institution of Higher Education where the research was carried out.

Thirdly, the research sought to critically examine the model of higher education student relationships to the economy proposed by Brown and Scase (1994). I wanted to find out if their six category model of economy–student relationships, which was developed in the early 1990s with 18-21 year old students in traditional higher education replicated, and resonated with, the points of view of mature students in a post 1992 University College sector in a depressed part of the economy. Whilst it was likely that there would be similarities, it was also considered possible that differences were likely as a result of the regional context, the type of student and the positioning of the Institution within the hierarchy of higher education (Ball et al., 2002). It was considered highly likely that the findings will have major implications for careers education in higher education. We have a duty to ensure that the careers service is relevant to the needs of all Liverpool Hope University College students, regardless of social, cultural or academic backgrounds.

## **The National Context of the Research**

For the HE sector, the Government has set five 'targets': *increased participation, widened participation, fair access, retention, and graduate employment* (Garside, 2002). The fifth of these, *graduate employment*, has generally assumed the lowest priority, with the main focus being on access, participation and retention (Layer, 2004). Nevertheless, higher education continues to be promoted to prospective students in terms both personal and economic gains. As HEFCE notes,

'Participation in higher education will equip people to operate productively within the global knowledge economy. It also offers social benefits, including better health, lower crime and a more tolerant and inclusive society' (HEFCE, 2004).

At the same time, the comparatively poor education and training of its workforce has been a standing issue in the UK, leading to a long list of policy initiatives (LSC, 2003). The drive to enrol 50 per cent of the population in higher education before the age of 30 (UUK, 2004) can be interpreted, in part, as one of these initiatives. 'Widening participation,' by attracting students from under-represented groups (and in some cases, regions) has become a key policy objective, worth approximately £485 million of public investment (Garside, 2002).

Behind this rhetoric lie a number of demand-side assumptions. In recent years these assumptions have been challenged by labour market intelligence. It is widely accepted that since the late 1980s, organisations, job markets and recruitment practices have been subjected to far reaching changes (Rifkin, 1996, AGR, 1995, Brown and Scase, 1994). In the UK, the actual number of advertised 'graduate' vacancies has been falling since the mid-1990s. Approximately 48 degree-holders currently compete for every graduate vacancy, prompting some to argue that too many students are chasing too few jobs (Brown and Hesketh, 2004b, p. 8). As numbers leaving universities continue to rise it has been suggested that there effectively exists several graduate job markets, ranging from 'traditional' jobs with leading employers, to jobs taken by graduates for which no HE qualifications are required (Purcell et al., 2002).

## **The Research Sample and Foci**

The purpose of the study was to research the motivations of widening participation students at Liverpool Hope to enter higher education, their experiences whilst in HE, and their career aspirations and



employment 'realities' of a group of widening participation students at a University College. The research, from an initial research sample of 67 who completed a questionnaire, sought to capture the 'lived experiences' (Brown and Hesketh, 2004b, p.5) of an opportunity sample of 28 widening participation students who had enrolled via access programmes. All were 'mature' students, living and working in Merseyside. Over a two-year period the students participated in interviews and focus groups. Half were then 'traced' and interviewed approximately six months after graduation.

In addition to the main purposes of the research noted above, the study raises important issues about the nature of the widening participation student experience, the extent to which widening participation students are integrated into the socio-cultural life of HE institutions, and on what it means to be a student. It also questions current human capital assumptions about the link between higher education and 'graduate' employment, and from this, the assumption that individuals respond to 'market signals' when deciding which subjects to study, which institutions to attend, and ultimately, which jobs to apply for (Brown and Hesketh, 2004b, p.3).

### **Why a Focus on Careers?**

As manager of the careers service at Liverpool Hope, my work brings me into daily contact with students from a range of backgrounds. In recent years, Liverpool Hope has been one of the UK's leading recruiters of widening participation students (Times, 2001, Sunday-Times, 2003). To date, few studies exploring the relationship between careers services and widening participation students have been undertaken (and none within the social and economic context of Merseyside). While there exists a reasonably developed literature on the factors influencing the enrolment of widening participation students the implications of widening participation on the practices of careers services have received less attention. Yet, as this thesis will argue, widening participation represents a key departure from the

traditional careers service paradigm, with far-reaching consequences for careers services and their employers. If, as Watts (1996) has argued, the primary source of 'power' exerted by careers services in HE institutions is based largely on their responsiveness to students' needs (Watts, 1996c), widening participation demands that career practitioners urgently review their models of delivery and underlying assumptions.

### **Defining 'widening participation'**

Despite its high profile, the vocabulary of widening participation remains somewhat ambiguous. Woodrow (2000) for example, argues that the terminology of widening participation has a capacity to disguise divisions and conceal contradictions. Consequently, the term 'widening participation' can be defined in a number of ways. Layer (2003) for example, offers:

'A range of initiatives designed to target groups, which are under-represented within the (higher education) system' (Layer, 2003).

A more detailed definition was provided by CVCP<sup>1</sup>:

'... ethnic minorities, the working class, disabled people, those without standard entry qualifications and mature students' (Metcalf, 1997).

'Widening participation' and 'widening access', though at times used interchangeably, refer to specific initiatives. As Woodrow (2000) argues, the term 'widening access' is often used in context of inclusion of under-represented groups. Participation, on the other hand (the more recent term), refers to the enhanced involvement of under-represented groups in institutions, subjects, and disciplines (Tonks and Farr, 2003). Thus, while the doubling of student numbers in higher education since the 1980s is widely viewed as a triumph for

---

<sup>1</sup> Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (now renamed Universities UK)



'access', the actual 'participation' of working class students across the sector remains roughly unchanged (Fazackerley, 2003).

An influential report for current 'widening participation' initiatives was '*The Dearing Report*', published by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE). To the Government and funding councils, The Dearing Report offered the following recommendation:

'When allocating funds for the expansion of higher education, they give priority to those institutions which can demonstrate a commitment to widening participation, and have in place a participation strategy, a mechanism for monitoring progress, and provision for review by the governing body of achievement' (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1998, chapter 7, point 2).

A year earlier, '*The Kennedy Report*' (Kennedy, 1997) had been published, with a similar recommendation – that student numbers in further and higher education be expanded by an additional 500,000 places by 2002 (Tight, 1998). Finally, in 2003 came the publication of '*The Future of Higher Education*' (D.f.E.S., 2003). Again, widening participation was a key objective; with the Government stressing its commitment to work towards increasing participation to 50 per cent of those aged 18–30, mainly through two-year work-focused foundation degrees.

### **Widening participation at Liverpool Hope**

Liverpool Hope University College has a history of involvement in widening participation initiatives. According to the college's 'Widening Participation' strategy document:

'Liverpool Hope's foundation is built upon a tradition of access and since its origins widening participation has been a key element in its mission' (LHUC, 2000, p.1).

In the early 1990s, widening participation work began at Hope with adjustments to admissions procedures, student induction programmes and on-course support. Subsidised, European-funded childcare facilities were provided for students with children (LHUC, 1999a). This approach proved successful, so that between 1994 and 2000, full-time home undergraduate student numbers at Hope grew by 65 per cent (Longden, 2003b, p.59). By the turn of the century, recruiting widening participation students had become a core objective within the college's strategy.

By 2000, Hope was recruiting 39 per cent of its students from the lower socio-economic groups, compared to the UK sector average of 25 per cent and the figure of 32 per cent for those institutions against which it was benchmarked (Longden, 2003b). Many of the new students entered Hope via the '*Reach Out*' programme – a European-funded programme targeted at local Merseyside-based residents. *Reach Out* was taught in communities with traditionally low higher education participation rates (Maguire, 2001). By such means, Liverpool Hope has positioning itself to become one of the UK's leading institutions for widening participation (Goddard, 2003, Kelly, 2004, Longden, 2003a, Macleod, 2003b, Lee, 2001, Lee, 1999).

### *Reach Out*

The majority of students who participated in this study enrolled, or studied at Hope, via *Reach Out* access or degree routes. *Reach Out* began in 1992 in the Granby / Toxteth areas of Liverpool, operated in conjunction with Liverpool City Council's *Parent School Partnership Scheme* (PSP), which provided venues and facilities. *Reach Out* was aimed at adults with young children, and those with limited or no recent educational experience who displayed the potential to go on to benefit from HE (LHUC, 1999a). *Reach Out* was defined by three elements:



- Delivery in a community location with free childcare available on site;
- Out-reach academic teaching and learning facilities available on 3 hour a week basis;
- The use of open learning techniques

*Reach Out* became a two-year part-time access course, which led directly to degree studies at Liverpool Hope. In 1997, funding was secured from DfEE to develop *Reach Out* at degree level. A further £3.4 million was obtained from the European Union Single Regeneration Bid (SRB)<sup>2</sup>. From 1998-99, students were thus able to enrol on part-time degree programmes taught in local inner city communities (LHUC, 1999b, p.57). In 2000, 115 widening participation students enrolled at Liverpool Hope via *Reach Out* access courses. Ages ranged from 22 to 73 with the majority being 26-40 years old.

### *Issues of retention*

While Liverpool Hope's proactive approach to widening participation brought commendations (Marks, 1999, Economist, 1998, Marks, 2000) it has been argued that not this policy is not only unsustainable, but has led to poor levels of retention – particularly amongst widening participation students (Sunday-Times, 2003)(Table 1.4 below).

---

<sup>2</sup> During this period, Merseyside was in receipt of EU Objective 1 funding.

Table 1.1: Top 10 UK HE institutions with the highest non-completion rates.

Ranking	Institution	Percentage of students projected to leave without a degree or to transfer to another institution
1.	University of North London	39
2.	London Guildhall University	35
3.	London South Bank University	34
4.	Bolton Institute of Higher Education	32
5.	University of East London	29
6.	Thames Valley University	28
7.	University of Gloucestershire	27
8.	Liverpool Hope University College	26
9.	University of Luton	26
10.	University of Sunderland	26

Source: (HEFCE, 2003)

According to HEFCE, around 26 per cent of Hope students fail to complete their courses. This is 11 per cent higher than the UK average and places Hope eighth highest in the HEFCE 'non-completion league table' (Table 1.1) (HEFCE, 2003, Macleod, 2003b). By way of an explanation, the *Sunday Times* drew a connection between widening participation and non-completion:

'Central to its mission is providing opportunities for those from families that have no background in higher education. Although it has easily exceeded targets for widening access, it has paid the price with a relatively high dropout rate of almost one in four' (Sunday-Times, 2003)

Locally, in a Merseyside context, non-completion at Liverpool Hope in 2002 was 16 per cent higher than at Liverpool University, and 5 per cent higher than at Liverpool John Moores University (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2. University performance indicators: Full-time courses, 2001 – 02

	Total entrants	State school	Working class	Non-completing	In employment
All UK Institutions	286,152	86%	26%	15%	93%
University of Liverpool	3,598	83%	22%	10%	95%
Liverpool Hope	1,339	97%	35%	26%	96%
LJMU	4,143	95%	33%	21%	91%

Source: HEFCE (2003)

The student profile at Liverpool John Moores is similar, in terms of both social class and educational background, to that of Liverpool Hope. Linking widening participation to student retention appears to represent a new departure for both the Government and HEFCE (Macleod, 2003b).

**Widening participation and Careers Services**

The staffing of careers services varies widely across the HE sector (Purcell and Rowley, 2000, pg. 3). In 2003, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS) produced an analysis of staffing levels at 58 universities<sup>3</sup>. Findings revealed staffing levels stratified according to age and type of institution. Although allowances must be made for economies of scale, such data would appear to indicate, indeed, confirm, that staffing levels are highest at careers services in pre-1992 institutions (see Table 1.3.).

<sup>3</sup> Data from the careers service at Liverpool Hope was included in this survey.



Table 1. 3: Average staffing levels in UK higher education careers services' (by job role)

	Universities		Colleges of HE	Liverpool Hope
	Pre-1992	Post-1992		
a) Head of Service	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
b) Deputy Head	0.73	0.28	0.00	0.00
c) Careers advisers	4.52	3.16	1.36	2.00
d) Administrative Assistants	3.06	1.14	0.48	0.50
e) Employer Liaison Staff	1.78	0.63	0.07	0.50
f) ICT staff	0.72	0.07	0.00	0.00
g) Information Assistants	2.48	1.93	0.82	0.50
h) Others (including externally funded)	1.36	0.81	0.98	2.00
i) Combined totals	15.6	9.02	4.71	6.50

Source: (AGCAS, 2003a)

Recently, the relationship between careers services and widening participation students has attracted ministerial attention. Careers services have been accused of being strategically and operationally ill-equipped to respond to the needs of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds (Purcell and Rowley, 2000) by continuing to promote a traditional paradigm (Watts, 1996c). This paradigm is centred on 'cosmopolitan' (national/international), hierarchical career trajectories within 'cosmopolitan', bureaucratic organisations. Not only have changes within society rendered this paradigm outdated, careers services, by promoting it, are alienating the very students who are most in need of their services (Rowley and Purcell, 2001).

The impact of widening participation on careers services is likely to be inconsistent, for in some institutions, widening participation assumes a greater level of strategic importance than in others. This is particularly the case in new universities and colleges of higher education. Across all institutions, however, student use of careers services is dominated by 'traditional' students – those from predominantly middle-class backgrounds, successful academic track

records and who are aged between 18 – 21 (Purcell and Rowley, 2000). Even within those institutions with large widening participation populations, mature students were all found to make substantially less use of careers services - 'either before or during their final year' (Purcell and Rowley, 2000). Up to a third of students from new universities and colleges, compared to less than a fifth of students at 'old' universities, were found to have had no contact whatsoever with their careers service during the entire time that they were enrolled at the institution (Purcell and Rowley, 2000). A study by MORI based on interviews with 1,040 students at 25 universities revealed a similar pattern, with students from 'new' universities being less likely to use careers services – particularly if the students were aged over 21 when enrolling (MORI, 2003). In each of these cases, widening participation students were found to have less involvement with institutional support services than students from 'traditional' backgrounds.

For Watts (1996), the relationship between careers services and widening participation students signifies a fundamental 'clash of paradigms' (Watts, 1997b, p.137). Using the analogy of 'cosmopolitans' and 'locals' (Gouldner, 1957) Watts argues that careers services, based on 'cosmopolitan' concepts and practices, are ill-suited when attempting to relate to 'local' students – students whose localized skills and knowledge are committed to and indeed defined by local markets, local communities, local conditions. For Watts (1996) and others, the concept of 'career' itself contains important social and cultural references, reflecting a profoundly middle class discourse (Tett, 2000, Tett, 1999, Ball et al., 2002). This discourse fails to acknowledge neither the highly segmented nature of access to higher education, nor the extent to which social, political, cultural and economic factors contribute to defining students' 'career' opportunities. As Ball et al (2002) argue, the assumption of a 'career' and (in particular) 'career choice' has to be viewed within a wider contextual setting: it is not simply a case for careers services to provide students with information from which they are expected to make informed decisions (Ball et al., 2002); rather for some students



a 'career' with its social, historic and cultural connotations could be an alien concept. For such students, 'career planning' is more likely to be viewed simply, rationally and pragmatically, in other words: 'to get a good job' (Ball et al., 2002).

### *The 'Harris Review'*

Political criticism of careers services intensified following the election of the Labour Government in 1997 (Tysome, 1997, Adenekan and Garner, 2003, Brignall, 2003, Tysome, 2003). In 2000 the criticism culminated in the first official review of (higher education) careers services since 1964 (Watts, 1997b, p.130). Ministers claimed that careers services had become 'out of touch' and 'out of date' 'Cinderella' organisations with limited impact on the direction of HE institutions (DFEE, 2000). To remedy this, the review panel, chaired by Professor Sir Martin Harris, was urged to lay the foundations for a new careers service, one capable of meeting the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Behind the review the following objective was emphasised:

'Where you study – and where you live after graduation – should not affect the quality of careers advice and guidance you receive' (DFEE, 2000).

When published, the 'Harris Review' (D.f.E.E., 2001) illustrated the extent to which careers services were perceived as being unprepared for widening participation. Consequently, it would be the 'expectation' that careers services in the future would explore new ways for identifying 'within their first term of study' students who were particularly likely to need to help and guidance (Harris, 2001). Significantly, the Harris Review also acknowledged that widening participation students required different types of help from "traditional" students. To fulfill their institutional objectives, careers services would need to develop both strategies and resources which were capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of a more diverse and complex student body.



## **The careers service at Liverpool Hope**

As part of the Harris Review, Liverpool Hope was selected to be one of four careers services to feature as a case study in the final report (Butcher, 2000). The case study focused on the strategic contribution made by the careers service across the institution, and on specific aspects of its operational delivery. The careers service was found by the auditors to provide 'a comprehensive range of resources to students and staff at Liverpool Hope' (Butcher, 2000). This support was found to exist at both a curricula and central service level. Students could access careers service resources and expertise either individually, via the Careers Centre, or via their programmes of study, via specially designated 'career management' modules and work-based learning (Butcher, 2000).

*Table 1.4* provides a summary of the careers service-related provision made available to students in 2003 at Liverpool Hope. From this, several points are worth noting. First, career guidance interventions are available formally to all students throughout their programmes of study. Career guidance is also available to graduates of the college up to five years after the date of their graduation.

Table 1.4. Careers service provision at Liverpool Hope

Certificate (Year I)	Intermediary (Year II)	Higher (Year III)	Post- Graduation
Career guidance consultations	Career guidance consultations	Career guidance consultations	Career guidance consultations
Careers information resources (including the provision of PCs)	Careers information resources (including the provision of PCs)	Careers information resources (including the provision of PCs)	Careers information resources (including the provision of PCs)
Taught module 'Unique Learning'	Taught module 'Work-based learning'		
Departmental presentations	Departmental presentations	Departmental presentations	
Careers events and seminars	Careers events and seminars	Careers Events and seminars, including Careers Fairs	Careers Fairs
Business Bridge	Business Bridge	Business Bridge	

Second, Liverpool Hope has integrated career management skills into the academic curriculum via specially designated generic modules entitled '*Unique Learning*' (Butcher, 2000). Each of the students participating in this study completed 'Unique Learning' module.

Nonetheless, the experience of the careers service at Liverpool Hope with students from widening participation backgrounds is consistent with national trends. Since the mid 1990s user surveys carried out by the careers service have indicated that, despite targeted marketing, widening participation students are under-represented at careers fairs, employer presentations and recruitment seminars. Other evidence also suggests that widening participation students are less likely than others to make appointments to discuss their options with careers advisers. This has raised a number of issues related to the strategic role of the careers service and the formation of its long-term priorities that have informed this research.

## **Merseyside: social and economic context**

The location of Liverpool Hope within Merseyside, allied to the local nature of widening opportunities students, makes it clear that the economic situation of the region must be examined as a major contextual factor.

Merseyside is a region with a falling population and rising economic inactivity (GMLSC, 2002). Engineering and manufacturing – once the staple providers of employment (LSC, 2003) - have declined, while opportunities in the service sector have increased. This 'post-industrial shift' (GMLSC, 2002) has had numerous implications for the resident community. For men, the decline of the 'heavy industries' has led to higher than average levels of unemployment. For women, the growth of the service sector has created many new, and in many cases, flexible work opportunities (Warhurst and Nickson, 2001). By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century more women were employed in Merseyside than men (GMLSC, 2002).

From the late 1990s, job opportunities in the region began to expand due to the expansion of the financial services sector and the growth of telephone call centres (now one of the region's largest employers). This turnabout has been so considerable, the GMLSC argues, that the economic future of the region now offers cause for qualified hopefulness:

'We are relatively optimistic about Greater Merseyside's economic prospects in the short and medium term, although faster output growth is unlikely to translate into more jobs overall ... this is a marked improvement on the employment performance of the 1980s and 1990s' (GMLSC, 2002)

Nevertheless, Merseyside as a region retains one of the lowest levels of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita (73% of the EU average) of any area in the UK. Merseyside residents also earn among the lowest wages in the country (see Table 1.5). Salary differentials are



particularly marked among women, who are more likely to be employed in low-skill, low paid service sector work (see Table 1.5).

Table 1.5. Regional earnings by gender

	Males				Females			
	(£) Ave. earnings	Percentage earning under			(£) Ave. earnings	Percentage earning under		
		£250	£350	£460		£190	£250	£350
N. West	£440.70	19.0	44.8	66.7	325.60	16.7	39.3	66.7
M. Side	£416.70	20.0	47.9	69.8	304.00	16.1	42.7	71.1

Source: Greater Merseyside LSC

Levels of unemployment in Merseyside remain high, both for the North West of England and for the UK (M.E.R., 2004, p.4). Levels of employment in Merseyside in 2001 stood at just under 60 per cent. This compares with 71 per cent in the North West and 74.1 per cent in the UK as a whole (Collinson, 2001). During the same period unemployment in Liverpool averaged 11.1 per cent, compared to 5.7 per cent for the North West and 5.3 per cent for the UK (Collinson, 2001). Unemployment in Merseyside remains the highest in the UK (LSC, 2003)

### *Socio-economic classification*

As the economic decline of Merseyside has been amply documented (Collinson, 2001, Economist, 1998, Marks, 2000, Turok and Edge, 1999), so too numerous reports and surveys have been published on the multiple social and economic barriers facing the region. Merseyside, like other large conurbations, contains multiple and diverse sub-regions and mini-economies. While several Merseyside areas are among the wealthiest in the UK (M.E.R., 2003, CACI, 2003) many of the geographical sub-regions are poor and under-developed. According to Marks (2000, p.307: Table 1.6 below), Merseyside has ‘a relative dearth of white-collar workers and an over-representation of blue-collar workers’.

Table 1.6: Summary of Merseyside 'blue and 'white' social class

	Percentage totals: UK	Percentage totals: North West	Percentage totals: Merseyside
'White collar'	48.98	46.37	42.43
'Blue collar'	46.53	49.29	50.09

Source: Marks (2000)

Gross disposable household income in Merseyside during 1999 was almost half that of Greater Manchester - £13,113 million compared to £23,956 million (O.N.S., 2002). By 2000, Merseyside had one of the lowest average household incomes in the UK (Collinson, 2001), though by 2003 there were signs of recovery. During the three-year period from 2000 to 2003, the average household income rose by £5,100 to £24,700. While Merseyside household income is still lower than the national figure, the differential would appear to be narrowing (M.E.R., 2004, p.18).

*Education, Employment and Skills*

In 2001, 21.4 per cent of Merseyside's working age population was registered as having no qualifications. This was significantly higher than the UK average of 16 per cent (M.E.R., 2004, p.21). It was also higher than the average figure recorded for the North West of England (Table 1.7). The Merseyside Economic Review (2004) attributes this to 'decades of under-investment and lower levels of business activity'.

Table 1.7. Skill levels (% of working age population, 2001)

	Merseyside	North West	UK
NVQs	3.3	3.5	4.3
4	16.2	17.7	19.5
3	21.6	21.9	20.8
2	31.1	30.4	29.2
1	8.1	8.8	10.0
No qualifications	21.4	18.9	16

Source: Merseyside Economic Review, 2004,p.21

Educational achievement in Greater Merseyside continues to lag behind the rest of the country. In 2002, 46 per cent of young people achieved five higher-grade GCSE passes, compared to a national average of 52 per cent (GMLSC, 2003, p.3). Added to this, the number of people undergoing job-related training programmes is also considerably lower than the national average. Levels of literacy and numeracy are below the national average across Merseyside, and significantly so in the sub-regions of Halton, Liverpool and Knowlsley, where approximately four-out of-ten adults have been assessed as having difficulty reading and writing (GMLSC, 2003, p.4) Of the twenty-eight students in this study, all lived and worked in Merseyside.

The Reach Out Access course thus has recruited many students from such deprived backgrounds, the effects of which will be considered later in the findings of the research.



## **Advance Organiser for the Thesis**

Building upon the above, the chapters of this thesis have been organised according to the following structure:

*Chapter 2* contains an in-depth discussion of the main sources of literature consulted during the study regarding widening participation students and their experiences.

*Chapter 3* begins with an account of the conceptual framework of the research before presenting the research methodology and schedule of activities.

*Chapter 4* provides worked examples of how data gathered from two of these methods (a focus group and a tracer interview) was analysed.

*Chapter 5* looks at the detailed issues to have emerged from the study by focusing on five widening participation student case studies.

*Chapter 6* revisits and reflects on the findings of the study in the light of the earlier literature and conceptual framework.

*Chapter 7* explores the relationship between widening participation students and the world of work. In particular, Brown and Scase's (1994) work orientations model is discussed in reference to the study at Liverpool Hope.

Finally, *Chapter 8* seeks to discuss the implications of the study from the perspectives of the various stakeholders – widening participation students, the careers service, the college and the wider sector

# **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **Advanced Organiser**

This chapter will discuss and reflect on the literature consulted during the research process. The aim here is to encapsulate literature relevant to the research issues, as well as that relating to the conceptual framework. Literature in the field is substantial. In recent years, numerous books, reports, journal articles and surveys have been published on the subjects of widening participation, the changing nature of UK higher education, graduate employment and the role of higher education careers services. Judging by the breadth of articles published by the press during the period, widening participation and graduate employability are highly newsworthy – more so perhaps in light of the continuing debate on student debt and university tuition fees (Baty, 2003, Callender, 2003, Macleod, 2003a, Thomson and Sanders, 2003).

This review of the literature has been structured around the study's three underpinning research issues:

- What motivates widening participation students to enrol in higher education;
- Widening participation students in higher education: their experiences, insights and aspirations;
- Implications for the careers service at Liverpool Hope University College.

In turn, each of these categories is sub-divided to allow for a more in-depth and reflexive discussion.

## **Factors motivating widening participation students to enrol in higher education**

This section focuses on exploring contemporary literature on access or entry into higher education. As Tight (2003) explains, this can be examined from numerous perspectives. Below is a brief summary of some of the key literature in this field.

### ***Participation and Non-Participation***

In an article on student participation, Bamber and Tett (1999) argued that a range of organizational and pedagogical issues must be addressed before participation in higher education can be broadened significantly. Attempting to identify these barriers, Archer and Hutchings (2000, 2001) carried out research with a 16 –30 year old, ‘working class’ students. They argued that the dominant, ‘working class’ perception of higher education is based on ‘risk’, ‘costs’ and ‘benefits’. In contrast, they concluded that students from middle class backgrounds were more likely to conceptualize higher education in vocational terms. Thus,

‘more affluent backgrounds see [higher education] as vital for securing better job prospects [whereas] young people from less affluent backgrounds see it as irrelevant, believing that the only jobs available are low grade, irrespective of qualifications’ (Archer and Hutchings, 2000).

For working class students a ‘whole network of discourses’ can contrive to make higher education ‘thinkable’ or ‘unthinkable’ (Hutchings and Archer, 2001). According to Archer & Hutchings (2000), the ‘problem’ lies in the language, ‘habits’ and culture of higher education, which while emphasizing the ‘rhetoric of equality’ contains a bias towards those from middle class backgrounds. Until this is addressed they concluded efforts to redress the social balance of the sector are unlikely to succeed.



Even if working class students successfully overcome the obstacles which Archer and Hutchings (2000) claim await them in higher education, their comparative disadvantage is likely to perpetuate beyond graduation. Their research found that middle class students tended to articulate career goals in clear, specific language. Working class students, on the other hand, displayed a tendency to conceptualize careers by using generalist terminology, e.g. 'to achieve better jobs and to better myself' (Archer and Hutchings, 2000).

For Callender (2003), the issue of participation and non-participation is intrinsically linked to finance – specifically, attitudes to debt. Unless higher education acknowledges this, she argues, the proportion of working class students entering the sector will remain low. Calendar's research led her to argue that prospective students from poor backgrounds were more likely to have negative attitudes to debt than those from more affluent backgrounds. This in turn was likely to deter them from entering higher education. Callender identified the 'typical' non-higher education participant as a white male from a lower social class whose mother had not been to university and who feared debt (Fazackerley, 2003).

A historical dimension was provided by Forsyth and Furlong (2000) who linked participation in higher education to performance in school. They argued that groups that are under-represented in HE also tend to be those that are marginalized by schools. Like Reay et al (2002) Forsyth and Furlong (2000) argued that participation (and non-participation) was not linked to a particular 'class condition'. Instead, it was mediated by ethnicity, marital status and gender, 'and these mediations are played out in mature students' negotiations of the HE process' (Reay et al., 2002, p.17 ).

Once enrolled in higher education, widening participation students' choice of subject and institution has been found to be dependent on local provision. Tight (Tight, 2003, p.93) cites one study which found an increasing tendency among students to opt for universities closer

to their homes (Croot and Chalkley, 1999). Although convenient for home, work and families, Brennan and Shah question the extent that such students become integrated into the social and cultural aspects of higher education (Brennan and Shah, 2003). Unless integrated, 'dropping out', or failing to complete the course, would seem to be more of a viable option. In an attempt to identify which widening participation groups were most at risk from dropping out, HEFCE developed a risk analysis chart consisting of six pre-identified categories (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Categories of Widening Participation

	<i>Young</i>	<i>Mature</i>
<b>Low risk</b>	A-levels or Highers with at least 17 points; degree or higher-level qualification. <b>Weighted 0</b>	A-levels or Highers with at least 27 points; degree or higher-level qualification. <b>Weighted 0</b>
<b>Medium risk</b>	A-levels or Highers of 9 to 16 points; foundation courses; Baccalaureate. <b>Weighted 1</b>	A-levels or Highers with less than 27 points; HE below degree level; foundation courses; access courses. <b>Weighted 1.5</b>
<b>High risk</b>	Less than 9 A-level points; access course; BTEC; GNVQ level 3; HE below degree level; none; others; unknown. <b>Weighted 1.5</b>	BTEC; GNVQ level 3; Baccalaureate; none; others; unknown. <b>Weighted 2.5</b>

Source: HEFCE (HEFCE, 1998)

*Table 2.1* illustrates how widening participation students – particularly those with low level academic attainment and 'mature' in age, are considered by HEFCE to be particularly at risk of non- completion.

Several studies have explored the issue of families on patterns of participation. Gorard, Rees and Fevre (1999) claimed the critical factor in the creation of 'learner identities' in higher education was the



influence of families. Family, they argued, plays a vital role in the 'transition from initial to post-compulsory education' (Gorard et al., 1999). Claiming that the influence of family is neglected in studies of participation (Gorard et al., 1999) they illustrated ways that the family can play an important role in influencing students' perceptions of educational opportunities. This view, however, was challenged, by a study undertaken with 200 widening participation students at a North West college of higher education (Bee, 2003). Here, it was found that students with close relatives who had completed a degree were more likely to experience anxiety, stress and depression than students from families with no higher-education experience.

### *From Access to H.E.*

Exploring student experiences in the transition from access to higher education, and its implications for both institutions and careers services, is a major theme in this study. Several publications have proven useful. An historical perspective on the origins and underlying philosophy of access studies was provided by Wakeford (1993). More critically, Hayes, King and Richardson (1997) compared approaches to learning and teaching on access courses with those in higher education, arguing that the 'culture' of access studies was generally inconsistent with that of mainstream HE institutions. This provided students with 'poor academic preparation' for degree courses (Hayes et al., 1997). Even though the majority of access students went on to complete their degrees, Hayes et al (1997) found that above average numbers withdrew for personal or academic-related reasons. Degree performance among access students was also found to be significantly lower than that among 'conventional university students' (Hayes et al., 1997).

The experiences and aspirations of access students was a key theme for West (1995, 1996) who was critical of what he perceived to be the limitations of quantitative methods when researching the 'complex lives' of students (Marshall, 1997). West was particularly critical of



large-scale surveys, which he claimed relied on closed questions and highly structured questionnaires. Arguably, the strength of West's (1996) research lay in its use of biographical, research methods. Such methods offered the potential for revealing multiple, 'fragmentary ways in which adult learners reconcile their past, present and future' lives. By establishing close relationships with students over a three and a half year period, West (1996) was able to reflect on the complex 'turning points' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) and inner complexities which underpinned students' decisions to enroll. He wrote:

Participation in higher education is the product of a considered calculation of material self-interest; the rest is superfluous.  
(West, 1996)

West's (1996) methodology, however, has also attracted criticism. Marshall (1997), for example, questioned whether instead of 'giving voice to the voiceless' aspects of West's (1996) approaches might have strayed into 'voyeurism' (Marshall, 1997). Though this claim was later disputed (see for example, Kelsey, 1999), it serves to underline the importance of a heightened ethical awareness within qualitative research.

Reay, Ball & David (2002) published a similar study on the transition from access to higher education. Drawing on the experiences of twenty-three mature students, they argued that the experiences of students was dependent on a complex 'intersection' of factors linked to ethnicity, gender, marital status, and social class. Such factors, they claim, can prove so formidable as to partly explain why across the UK, mature student numbers are in decline<sup>4</sup> (Reay et al., 2002).

Case study and life history techniques were used by several studies to explore from a first-hand perspective the experiences of mature students making the transition from access to higher education. Tett (1999) undertook research with adult learners in Glasgow where she

---

<sup>4</sup> Numbers of mature students fell from 100,300 in 1997-8 to 90,858 in 1998-99 (Ball, Reay & David, 2002).

was particularly interested in documenting educational experiences. Tett's (1999) research led her to suggest that perceptions of opportunities are related to gender identities. Women, Tett (1999) argued, were more likely to view the benefits of higher education in terms of family and domestic advantages. Men, however, were more likely to focus on vocational benefits.

In an earlier paper, Bamber and Tett (1999) described higher education as leading to a fragmentation of working class students' lives. Universities, they argued, promote their own concepts of equity, which in turn 'reflect ideological positions and influence the practice that is seen as acceptable' (Bamber and Tett, 1999). Social class is not an abstract concept; instead it is 'real and operative in the daily lives' of students (Bamber and Tett, 1999). Not only did working class students have to 'struggle' to gain entry to higher education, once enrolled, 'struggle' became a key feature of their day-to-day existence, as they struggled to balance jobs, families and course work. Rarely was this reflected in the design or structuring of academic programmes. As such, failure or the risk of failure was located not in institutions, but with the students themselves.

Warmington (2003) was interested in using ethnographic methods to explore how widening participation students perceived the social, cultural and economic benefits of higher education. Like other writers, Warmington (2003) found HE to be a largely anonymous place for non-traditional students, recording voices 'saturated by tensions deriving from (students') experiences as disaffected workers on the peripheries of the labour market' (Warmington, 2003). His study found that students enrolled in higher education for three reasons: first, to avoid the 'stigma' of welfare dependency; second, to acquire qualifications to insure them against the vagaries of an uncertain job market; third, to avoid as far as possible the risk that their own 'negative agency' might transmit a culture of poverty and exclusion to their children (Warmington, 2003).



The perceived link between higher education and improved career prospects was reflected in two reports commissioned for the (then) Department for Education and Employment (Connor, 1999, Connor et al., 2001). Each of these reports illustrates how diverse issues can affect students' decisions to enroll (Connor, 1999). For many, 'getting a better job' was the primary motivating factor, even though only a minority had a particular job or career in mind upon entering HE (Connor, 1999, Connor et al., 2001).

### *Impact of local communities*

The study takes place within an English region which in recent years has experienced a well documented industrial decline (GMLSC, 2002, Anderson and Munch, 1999, Collinson, 2001, D.f.E.S., 2002, Economist, 1998, M.E.R., 2003, O.N.S., 2001, Turok and Edge, 1999). In relation to this, a range of statistical and research-orientated data has been assembled. Much of the data has been produced by government organisations i.e. the North West Regional Development Agency and the Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council (GMLSC). Data has also been obtained from local organisations such as universities and employers. Yet while quantitative data on Merseyside is useful for revealing macro economic trends, qualitative data is required in order to learn more about the impact of economic change on those communities in which students live and work.

Marks (1999) documented some of the various social, cultural, economic and historical barriers facing (predominantly) working class people in Merseyside when considering higher education:

'They (local people) dare not stray onto the campus to see what it is about, and the residential halls seem like private hotels for another kind of being. Spiritually, the institution is alien. The local people – of course – could have no interest in questions of life, judgement, value' (Marks, 1999).



For Marks (1999), relatively few local people were likely to have been academically successful in school. Hence, enrolling in FE or HE was likely to imply a series of identity-related challenges. Like Archer & Hutchings (2000) Marks (1999) argued that by failing to differentiate between different groups of potential applicants, universities risked perpetuating the imbalances of the past:

'It is one thing to mouth the mantras of opportunity (how many outside the confines of academia would hear them anyway?), but it is quite another to do anything about it' (Marks, 1999).

In a follow-up paper, Marks (2000) considered the specific cultural and economic position of working-class men in Merseyside. Like Archer et al, 2001, he argued that working class men drew on various discourses of masculinity when contemplating education. Such contemplations included taking into account what Marks (2000) termed 'their assumed 'breadwinner' role and its pertinence within the prevalent regional context of 'living off one's wits' (Marks, 2000). Drawing on wider research, Marks (2000) argued that universities need to adapt if they are to offer an image and environment that will appeal to working class adults - particularly working-class males.

### *Participation and social class*

The impact of social class on higher education participation is a reoccurring theme in the literature. Issues related to social class and higher education were dealt with extensively by Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994, Robbins, 1993, Jenkins, 2002). Similarly, the impact of social class on graduate employment was a key issue for Brown & Scase (1994). Several studies have combined social class and participation to argue that while the absolute number of students entering higher education has risen, the relative proportion of students from middle and working class backgrounds has remained unchanged (see for example,

Longden, 2003a, Connor, 1995, Blackburn and Jarman, 1993, Callender and Brown, 2003).

Ball, Davies, David and Reay (2002) explored the issue of social class in terms of 'choices' and 'decisions'. They argued that both concepts were invested with certain class-related meanings. 'Choice' for example, implies multiple options and the opportunity to make informed judgments. 'Decisions' on the other hand, are restricted, take-it-or-leave-it responses to pre-set conditions: to enroll or not to enroll, to stay the course or to leave to find a job? As Ball et al (2002) argued:

'Choice suggests 'openness in relation to a psychology of preferences'; (while) decision making alludes to power and constraints' (Ball et al., 2002)

Ball et al (2002) claim that for some groups, the concept of 'choice' is misleading, for it assumes 'a kind of formal equality that obscures the effects of real inequality'. Despite this, understanding the implications of 'choice' is essential if the inequalities in the HE sector are to be addressed. Through a 'subtext of choice,' the authors claimed that universities perpetuate the 'social gap' between students from different social and cultural backgrounds. For Ball et al (2002), each institution possesses its own habitus. This in turn, attracts (or moulds) like-minded students endowed with similar social and cultural predispositions (Ball et al., 2002). Like Bourdieu (1994), Ball et al (2002) conceptualize higher education as a 'classed' experience, one which retains and serves a predominantly middle class ethic. Accepting that working class people may also derive benefits from higher education, their involvement is likely to be as consumers rather than 'owners'. Working-class students remain Bourdieu's 'lucky survivors' – the 'social and cultural exceptions or 'the least disadvantaged of the most disadvantaged' (Ball et al., 2002).

Ball et al's (2002) arguments can appear slightly deterministic. Rather than allowing for students to construct their own identities – e.g. through interaction with others, etc. (Burr, 2000) the implication is



that students are defined, to a greater or lesser extent, by their social class. The use of concepts such as 'normal' and 'choice' biographies make little allowance for the 'retrospective rationalization' which according to West (1996) can occur when people reflect on their biographies at a later stage. My experience from conducting this study has been that students do indeed, retrospectively rationalize their biographies, which makes it difficult and unreliable to ascribe class-related explanations on to subsequent actions.

### **Widening participation students in H.E. their experiences, insights and aspirations**

This section explores a sample of literature dealing specifically with the experiences, insights and aspirations of widening participation students while enrolled in higher education.

#### *Documenting the trends*

For Slowey (2000), the origins of widening participation reflect a complex process of social and economic change. In particular, she cites the polarizing effects of globalization and regionalization. These, she argues, have contributed to 'differential' education policies which, when activated, have led to the promotion of certain groups over others. For Slowey (2000) the key point is how widening participation is defined. For the past 25 years, the term 'non-traditional' has been synonymous with mature students (i.e. those aged 21 and over on enrolment). However, given the changes that have taken place in the sector since the 1980s, such definitions are no longer sufficient – particularly given that in some institutions, students aged 18 to 21 now constitute a minority:

'...we must look in more detail at who the students actually are, their experiences of higher education and what institutions they attend. We know that age, gender, ethnic status, social class, disability, family situation, employment, rural location are all important determining factors' (Slowey, 2000).



Slowey (2000) views the 'pivotal' moment in the history of widening participation as the publication of *The Dearing Report* (N.C.I.H.E., 1997). This recommended that resources for expanding teaching should be concentrated in institutions that had a history of recruiting students from 'under-represented sections of society' (Slowey, 2000). From this, Slowey (2000) attempts to re-define widening participation by focusing on four groups: women, students from lower social class backgrounds, ethnicity, and by institution of study. Slowey's (2002) argument is that despite the rhetoric, widening participation is largely restricted to post-1992 universities, for it is within such universities that 'adult learners, part-time students and those from working-class backgrounds are most likely to be found'. This is an important point, one made by several writers. Leathwood and O'Connell (2003), for example, argued that despite the 50 per cent target the majority of 'new students' entering higher education had been recruited by post-1992 universities. For them, this served to reinforce the perceived elitism of pre-1992 universities while, at the same time, emphasising that universities which accepted widening participation students were inherently 'second best' (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003).

Slowey (2002) concludes that while there is little doubt that more people are now involved in 'structured studying in a wider variety of ways,' the 'participation gap' between different social classes in higher education remains 'stubbornly wide' (Slowey, 2000). Furthermore, the majority of 'new learners' – students whose entry into the sector had been primarily facilitated by widening participation initiatives, are still located primarily in institutions perceived (it is not clear by whom) to be at the lower end of the institutional ranking tables (Slowey, 2000).

### *Recording the experiences of widening participation students*

When writing about the experiences of specific groups in higher education, Mohanty (2003) suggests that what is required from researchers is,

'a workable notion of how a social group is unified by a common culture, as well as the ability to identify genuine cultural differences and similarities across groups'.  
(Mohanty, 2003, p.392)

Mohanty (2003) warns against 'universalizing' student experiences, particularly, in this case, the 'experiences' of students from under-represented groups. Mohanty (2003) claims that within the literature, two approaches to group identity exist: '*essentialism*,' based on the view that group identities are both stable and (more or less) unchanging; and '*postmodernism*'. The postmodern stance 'insists' that identities are both 'fabricated' and 'constructed'. Experience, being unstable and 'constructed', can never be a source of objective knowledge. Mohanty (2003) suggests a third position exists - '*the epistemic status of cultural identity*' - in other words, experience, if properly interpreted, can yield reliable and genuine knowledge, just as it can point up instances and sources of mystification:

'Experiences can be true or false, can be evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and his world, for experiences refer very simply to the variety of ways humans process information'. (Mohanty, 2003, p.393)

For Mohanty (2003), there are different ways of 'making sense' of an experience. Indeed, by making sense of an event can lead to the creation of new experiences. Added to this, the 'constructed nature of experience' suggests that experiences do not have, necessarily, self-evident meanings. Nor, due to the constructed nature of experience, will they by necessity lead to a common sharing of values or beliefs.

'Essentialist' definitions have tended to dominate the literature on student experiences. Acknowledging this, Tight (2003) argues that the 'bulk' of research into student experience in higher education has tended to focus on 'young, full-time undergraduates'. Read (2003) acknowledged this by warning against the dangers of stereotyping. Students, in Read's (2003) view, are not 'passive 'receivers' of academic culture, but can be seen to engage in and even challenge these discourses of 'otherness' (Read et al., 2003).



Studies on the widening participation student experience have tended to focus on cultural differences. Several of these draw upon the work of Bourdieu (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, Reay, 1998a, Reay et al., 2002, Warmington, 2003), particularly constructs such as habitus, field, symbolic capital, symbolic violence, etc. Others have utilised the sociological concept of 'risk'. Britton and Baxter (2001), for example, carried out a longitudinal study with widening participation students at a 'new' university. Their aim was to document the different types of 'risk' to which students were exposed. For Britton and Baxter (2001), risk has become 'central to contemporary theories of modernity' (Britton and Baxter, 2001, p. 88). In this, they draw heavily on the work of Beck (1994) and Giddens (1991). Beck (1994) applied the concept of risk to illustrate how, in a period of 'late modernity', social life is characterised by the continued collapse of once fixed 'signposts' such as 'community', 'class', and 'gender'. In this scenario, biographies do not simply unfold 'according to customs and traditions'. Instead, identities have to be 'forged' out of competing and contradictory possibilities, to be developed and redefined over time (Giddens, 1991 quoted by Britton and Baxter, 2001, p. 88). For widening participation students, one of the first 'risks' to be experienced is the risk of redefined relationships in the home. Participation in higher education, by leading to 'inevitable' transformation of the working class habitus, can cause tension and strain in domestic relationships with family and friends. As Britton and Baxter (2001) argued,

'Habitus refers not merely to the external markers of social position, such as occupation, education and material wealth, but also to embodied dispositions which generate thought and action' (Britton and Baxter, 2001, p.89).

Enrolling in higher education was found to challenge previously 'taken for granted' gender divisions of labour and responsibilities. From this led feelings of 'being different', coupled with what Britton and Baxter



(2001) termed, 'the imputation of superiority' – feelings of being better educated than others. Higher education also led to a transformation of students' social identities, leaving many working class students feeling uncertain of their class identity. As Britton and Baxter (2001) concluded, 'In this process of becoming a different person, gender and class interact to produce specifically gendered and classed experiences of this painful transition' (2001, p.87).

Brine and Walker (2004) also drew on Beck (Beck, 1994) and Giddens (Giddens, 1991) in their study of working class women in higher education, but arrived at different conclusions from Britton and Baxter (2001). While accepting that higher education represents a series of identity-related challenges (particularly in terms of the relationship between academic aspirations and domestic 'realities') they disagreed over the extent to which higher education led to the formation of a new class identity. Instead, they found that higher education rarely resulted in higher earnings or access to higher-level occupations. Their study revealed students trying to come to terms with painful and 'contested' class processes, which in turn were framed by the assumption that 'if you are educated, you must be middle class' (2004, p.110).

Both studies, though disagreeing on the extent that higher education redefined class identities depicted the experiences of widening participation students in terms of risk, isolation, and psychological fragmentation. In each case, female students suffered greater and more sustained periods of domestic problems than males – particularly in terms of their changed relationships with non-graduate partners and relatives. Rather than simply 'shedding old identities and donning unproblematic new ones', widening participation students – and particularly women - were found to experience concerted periods of confusion and contradiction (Brine and Waller, 2004, p.97).

## **Implications for careers services**

This section explores literature relating to careers services in higher education. Literature on the relationship between careers services and widening participation is limited. However, the field itself has a long and established record, including the work of prominent academics such as Holland (1973), Roberts (1997) and Super (1957). In the UK, Watts (1996a, 1999, 1996c, 1996b, 1997a, 1997b, 1978) has been the most prolific publisher, spanning a range of pre and post higher education careers work. Others have also been active: Law for example, (1999, 2003b, 2003c, 2003a, 2002) has written about the changing nature of career guidance, while over a similar period, both Arnold (1997a, 1997b) and Offer (2004, 2001) have explored new approaches to career guidance using Internet-based technology. In the US, writers such as Krumboltz (1994, 1998, 1999) and Luzzo (1999) continue to challenge practitioners by calling for new responses to guidance theory.

In 2000, the Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) formally reviewed the provision of higher education careers services. The review owed its origins to criticism levelled at careers services by the then Secretary of State for Higher Education (DFEE, 2000) that despite being rated among the best in the world by the OECD (2003) careers services were peripheral to their institutions, thus incapable of influencing the 'employability agenda' (Tysome, 1997). From the resulting report (D.f.E.E., 2001) several research papers were published. One of these, undertaken by Rowley and Purcell (2001) was based on a survey of careers service usage at a selection of UK institutions (none of which appeared to have been a college of higher education). Rowley and Purcell (2000) found that student use of careers services tended to highest among those from more privileged and statistically representative backgrounds. Widening participation students, despite being arguably most need of the services on offer, were less likely than others to visit careers services, as indeed, were students in general at 'new universities'. Similar findings emerged



from similar studies. In 2003, MORI (2003) carried out a study using data from over 1,000 graduates. Again, it was found that students at 'Russell Group' institutions were more likely to utilise their institutional careers services than students at other universities. Careers services, it was generally agreed, not only varied in quality, across the sector, standards varied in terms of what constituted 'baseline' provision (Adenekan and Garner, 2003) .

In Europe, Teichler has been active in publishing on career-related issues (1998, 1999, 2000). As Tight (2003, p.100) has argued, Teichler's concern has been to explore and to understand the changing nature of work and higher education, and to suggest how the relationship existing between both might be improved. Teichler (1999) wrote:

'Institutions of higher education and responsible governments, in reflecting the future challenges from the world of work, are clearly in need of improved information on employment and the work of graduates' (Teichler, 1999, p.308).

To access Teichler's 'improved information,' there has been a tendency in recent years for institutions to commission large scale, longitudinal surveys aimed at documenting graduate career patterns.<sup>5</sup> Underpinning these is an implicit assertion that the mandatory survey undertaken by careers services (DLHE) is insufficient for revealing longer-term labour market trends. While the remit of each survey has tended to differ slightly, findings have generally confirmed the policy view that job markets for graduates are continuously expanding, thus justifying the growth in higher education (Purcell and Pitcher, 1996, Purcell et al., 1999, Purcell and Rowley, 2000, Purcell et al., 2002, Purcell and Elias, 2004, Elias et al., 2000, Elias and Purcell, 2003). To counteract claims that 'graduate jobs' are diminishing in quality or status, adherents to this view, such as Elias and Purcell (2003), point to the 'graduate premium,' which, they claim, demonstrates that earnings are higher for those with degrees. Such findings however,

---

<sup>5</sup> For example, the *Institute for Employment Research* has undertaken several of the more prominent of these, supported by organisations such as *Graduate Prospects*, *AGR* and *UUK*.



have been strongly contested by (among others) academics such as Brown and Hesketh (2004a, 2003). Comparing the 'graduate premium' to endowment mortgages, which though performing well in the 1980s failed to live up to expectations a decade later, Brown and Hesketh (2004a, 2003) claimed a similar parallel exists within higher education. That demand for graduates has been high in the past does not, they argue, mean that this demand will continue unabated in the future – particularly given the supply-side growth of recent years.

## **Literature related to the Conceptual Framework**

This section explores some of the key literature consulted during the formation of the conceptual framework. Section 2.4 focuses on literature related to career theory and career orientations.

### ***Career Theory***

According to Killeen (1996), career theory has tended to focus on three issues: who is the 'agent'? What are the environments in which careers are made? What is the nature of career 'action'? From this, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue that career practitioners adhere to competing career theories. These, they summarise as: '*trait theory*' – an approach that views the purpose of career guidance as matching individuals to opportunities. This is achieved by comparing traits of personality, skills and interests to those required by certain jobs. Trait theory is perhaps typified by the work of Holland (Holland, 1973) who, after gathering large-scale data on employment trends formulated a 'trait and factor' theory which linked choice of career to personality type. Holland argued:

'People can function and develop best and find job satisfaction in work environments that are compatible with their personalities' (Holland, 1973).

In contrast, *development theory* views decision-making as dependent on matching stages of development with psychological and emotional

maturity. As such, developmental theories accept that people change as they mature. They also acknowledge the influences of external factors such as socio-economic agendas, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics and local opportunity structures. A major influence on developmental theories was the work of Super (1957). Super argued that people seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and implement and develop their self-concepts. 'Career maturity' – a key concept in Super's theory – is manifested in the 'successful accomplishment of age and stage development tasks across life span' (Careernet, 2002, Super, 1957). Self-awareness is an underlying factor in Super's theory:

'... vocational self-concept develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences ... As experiences become broader in relation to awareness of world of work, the more sophisticated vocational self-concept is formed' (Careernet, 2002, Super, 1957).

Finally, '*social learning theory*' is based on exploring the 'interaction of social and cultural factors on decision-making' (Hodkinson, 1998). These theories suggest that 'something important happens between the individual and the self and the structural world of work' (Law, 1999). Typically, they pay attention to the social world that connects these two realities. Careers represent 'encounters' which, for good or ill, 'shape the mental space or frame of reference that people use to map possibilities' (Law, 1999). Such theories suggest that career management can be impeded by negative factors or influences. As Law (1999, p.37) argues, people:

1. 'unthinkingly' reproduce traditional family or neighbourhood work choices;
2. suspect that there are more career options available to them that they know about;
3. are uncertain about where else to look;



4. are liable, as their social encounters develop and expand, to become dissatisfied and confused about their career ideas (Law, 1999).

Concern has been expressed, however, over the extent that such theories relate to current social, economic and political contexts. Critics such as Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) have argued that not only do such theories conceptualise career decision-making as a fundamentally individual process to be carried out by self-reliant, self-functioning 'agents,' they also harbour an implicit assumption of rationality: a tacit acceptance that 'satisfying career choice results when objectively measured abilities and interests match up with job availability' (Baumgardner, 1977). As Baumgardner (1977) wrote:

'People do not describe their career experiences as reflecting a series of logical choices or planned events. Rather, a variety of chance situational events and encounters with people have great impact on both occupational choice and career development' (Baumgardner, 1977).

Instead, Baumgardner (1977) claimed career decision-making was a 'quasi rational' process of 'chance', 'situational events' and 'encounters' with 'significant others'. Krumboltz et al (1999) developed this approach by stressing the importance of 'happenstance'. According to Krumboltz, career practitioners should help people understand how to act in ways that generate a 'higher frequency of beneficial chance events' on which they (the clients) can 'capitalize' (Krumboltz et al., 1999).

Calls for new approaches to career theory have intensified in line with an increased awareness that on a macro scale, economies in the Western world are changing, with considerable implications for work patterns (Rifkin, 1996, Rifkin, 2000). Changing patterns of employment are dealt with extensively in the literature (Watts, 1996a, Giddens, 2002, D.f.E.E., 1998, Watts, 1996b). Indeed, according to the Association of Graduate Recruiters (1995) so significant are these changes that a new vocabulary of work is required (see Table 2.2).



Table 2.2. The new vocabulary of graduate employment

FROM	TO
Ladders & Escalators	Bridges
Career Clarity	Fog
Employer	Customer
Job	Adding Value
Functional Identity	Project Team Role
Career	Portfolio
Progression	Personal Growth
Rising Income & Security	Maintaining Employability
Education & Training	Lifelong Learning

Source: AGR (1995)

Those calling for changes in career theory cite evidence from student surveys which suggest: a) students are ill-prepared (both in terms of skills and attitudes) for competing in job markets (Clare, 2003, Universum, 2002a); b) that they make little and sporadic use of careers services (MORI, 2003); c) that despite widening participation, careers services have limited contact with students from the poorest social and academic backgrounds (Rowley and Purcell, 2001); and d) the ability of careers services to prepare students for 21<sup>st</sup> century job markets is unevenly distributed across the sector (Adenekan and Garner, 2003, Brignall, 2003, DFEE, 2000, Rowley and Purcell, 2001, Tysome, 1997).

Recently, attempts have been made to update career theory within the context of 21<sup>st</sup> century job markets. In particular, attempts have been made to learn more about the role played by careers services in student transitions (MORI, 2003). Few of these studies have offered new insights (Perrone and Vickers, 2003). This has left careers services knowing *how* students are employed, but not *why* they are employed in certain jobs, nor the extent to which recorded destinations reflect students' aspirations.

*Brown and Scase Career Orientations Model*

The career orientation model developed by Brown and Scase (1994) offers a useful framework for exploring students' attitudes, or 'orientations', to careers. Brown and Scase (1994) carried out

research at three universities - 'old', 'new' (i.e. post 1992) and 'red brick'. They argued that graduate job markets are in the process of evolving from a 'bureaucratic' paradigm - one based on job security, status and organizational hierarchy - to an 'adaptive' paradigm consisting of uncertainty, change and self-reliance (Brown and Scase, 1994). Though this claim is not new (see for example, AGR, 1995), Brown and Scase (1994) develop it by attempting to identify 'bureaucratic' and 'adaptive' characteristics (see Table 2.3 ).

Table 2.3. Changing organizational paradigms

	<b>Bureaucratic</b>	<b>Adaptive</b>
<b>Selection</b>	Individual attributes De-personalized	Personal qualities Personality package
<b>Socialisation</b>	Compartmentalized Inter-positional Rule following	Holistic Inter-personal Code cracking, rule making
<b>Cognitive style</b>	Bureaucratic personality	Charismatic personality
<b>Symbolic / social control</b>	Impersonal Explicit ground rules	Personalized Implicit ground rules
<b>Promotion / success</b>	Explicit achievement Criteria based on bureaucratic work programme	Implicit achievement criteria based on inter- personal compatibility and performance
<b>Corporate culture</b>	Weak	Strong

Brown & Scase (1994, p.20).

Given the greater demands of operating within an adaptive paradigm, Brown and Scase (1994) argue that employers are increasingly seeking graduates possessing 'charismatic' skills. For Brown and Scase (1994) this illustrates the 'growing significance' in recruitment and selection of *cultural capital* - albeit in what they claim is an elaborated and largely hidden form. They argue that the application of cultural capital in the context of graduate recruitment serves to reinforce social and educational inequalities by discriminating against those whose cultural capital is different, or less highly valued.



Comparing the aspirations and realities of students at each of the three institutions led Brown and Scase (1994) to conclude that higher education was a class-related experience:

‘What students learn at university serves both as a preparation for employment and as a cultural apprenticeship for their anticipated or confirmed class status’ (Brown and Scase, 1994).

According to Brown and Scase (1994, p.62), students at new universities were ‘distinctly disadvantaged’ – particularly those from working class backgrounds – due to their lack of appropriate forms of cultural capital. This rendered it difficult for them to compete on level terms with middle class students studying at ‘established’ universities. In an attempt to chart the extent to which these broader ideological changes were affecting the attitudes and orientations of students to more ‘adaptive’ labour markets Brown and Scase (1994, p.88 - 115) identified eight ‘analytical clusters’, which they observed in students at each of the three universities (see Table 2.4).

These ‘clusters’ were divided into two categories under the headings *conformist* and *non-conformist*. Students with *conformist* orientations tended to view the pursuit of an occupational career as being central to their personal development and self-identity. Conversely those displaying predominantly *non-conformist* orientations largely rejected the concept of an occupational career, viewing it as neither central to their personal development or their identity (Brown & Scase, 1994, p.89).

Under each of these headings Brown and Scase (1994) identified three sub-headings. Most common among *conformists* they found to be *traditional bureaucracies*. These had only a ‘limited awareness of the ways in which organizations are re-structuring and the likely implications this would have on their future work plans (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.89). Work for *traditional bureaucracies* was more likely to be conceptualised in terms of a traditional ‘career’, which in turn was to be pursued in one organisation. Employment was constructed



around the concept of an ‘orderly progression’ within well-defined hierarchies. Typically, *traditional bureaucrats* sought to plan their careers with reference to organisational principles of promotion and age-related salary increments.

Table 2.4. Student Orientations to Work

Career ‘Clusters’	Description
CONFORMIST	Committed to pursuing occupational careers as central to their personal development. This category is refined into three sub-categories:
<i>Traditional Bureaucratic</i>	Possess limited understanding of how work is changing, possibly preferring to pursue their careers within one organisation.
<i>Entrepreneurial</i>	Resistant to corporate dependency. Will be more likely than any other category to have internalised rhetoric on self-reliance etc.
<i>Flexible</i>	Aware of how work is changing and are more comfortable with the idea of having to move between different organisations and jobs during their career.
NON CONFORMIST	Reject the notion of an occupational career as being central to their personal identities; ‘career’ is marginal to their life interests. This category is also refined into three sub-categories:
<i>Drop Out</i>	Taking time out, or on another level, may have rejected the notion of work and careers entirely. Similar to 1960s concepts of hippy generation – alternative lifestyles, different, non-material values, different conceptualisation of work and careers.
<i>Ritualist</i>	Approach work from the point of view that it is solely for income that they work; work is a necessary evil. They don’t invest in careers because that would require a psychological investment of interest, which they prefer to keep for outside interests and pursuits.
<i>Socially Committed</i>	Drawn to personal values and concerns, perhaps a social or environmental objective ahead of their own personal or career goals. May be drawn to jobs where they want to make a difference and where their values or ethics are strongly engaged. Will possibly hold this as being more important than corporate goals.

Source: Brown and Scase 1994 pp.88 – 115

This perspective contrasted with the alternative *conformist* orientation which Brown and Scase (1994) termed *flexible*. Students displaying ‘flexible’ traits were found to be more knowledgeable about the way

organisations were restructuring and the wider effects this was likely to have on their own labour market participation. Acknowledging and to some extent anticipating the decline of the traditional bureaucratic career students with *flexible* dispositions were found to be more familiar with the need to be both adaptive and mobile within labour markets. For them, work was considered to be insecure, uncertain and fragmented.

A more 'exaggerated' desire to avoid organisational dependency was found among students who Brown and Scase (1994) termed *entrepreneurial* (Brown and Scase, 1994, p. 90). In comparison to those exhibiting *traditional bureaucratic* and *flexible* dispositions, *entrepreneurial* students were viewed as being more likely to have internalised rhetoric that emphasised the value of self-employment and self-reliance. Although such students were less inclined to work for large organisations they tended to be highly committed to notions of personal and material success. Brown and Scase (1994) claimed that these students were more likely to engage in various non-curricular entrepreneurial opportunities available at university (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.90).

Under *non-conformist* career orientations, Brown and Scase (1994) identified three further sub-categories. *Drop-outs*, they claimed, had only a limited intention of pursuing organisational-based careers. Instead, their aim was found usually to be located around the development of alternative lifestyles. When *drop-outs* did enter employment it was frequently only to gain enough income 'to get by' (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.90). The authors did acknowledge, however, that *drop-outs* could in time reappraise their negative orientations towards employment and develop views similar to other *non-conformists* whom they termed *ritualists*.

Although *ritualists* recognised the need for employment they were found to define this primarily in relation to the need for income. For *ritualists* work was conceptualised primarily as an instrumental necessity rather than a channel for self-development. They were



equally unlikely to identify or empathise with the psychological and emotional aspects of organisational careers. In terms of orientations *ritualists* were found to be frequently located within large bureaucratic organisations – organisations upholding rules, hierarchies, job descriptions and enough 'psychological shelter' to afford them space nurture their outside interests and identities (Brown and Scase, 1994).

Students with *socially committed* orientations were defined by values and ethical considerations (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.91). Students with *socially committed* preferences were more likely to explore employment in voluntary and not for profit sectors. For them, career progression and material reward was often less important than a sense of personal fulfilment.

Though Brown and Scase (1994) were keen to stress their conceptual categories were neither mutually exclusive nor fixed in time and space (they acknowledged that students' orientations were liable to change given different circumstances) their ideal type categories provide a conceptual framework for seeking to understand how individual students orientate themselves to work opportunities. Significantly, Brown and Scase (1994) viewed the way that students orientate themselves to employment as being related to social structures:

... it is clear that student perspectives (on employment) are *not* (original italics) randomly determined but are a consequence of systematic differences in their material circumstances as shaped by such factors as social class, race, gender and educational biography' (Brown and Scase, 1994, p. 92).

Exploring the individual and structural dimensions of student orientation to employment is an important element in this study's conceptual framework. To do this, I have found the theoretical work of Pierre Bourdieu helpful. Elements of Bourdieu's theoretical



approaches to education and employment are explored in the next section.

### **Literature relating to Bourdieu**

Terminologies such as 'educational biography' and 'cultural capital' suggest a link between Brown and Scase (1994) and the literature of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theoretical and conceptual thinking has been central to the development of the conceptual framework of this study for, like others I have found Bourdieu's organising concepts of cultural capital, field and habitus both 'good to think with' (Webb et al., 2002, Reay, 1998b, Jenkins, 2002) and a useful method for understanding the way in which social structures can be seen to 'interweave' with students' experiences (Reay, 1998b). In particular, Bourdieu's conceptual framework has provided a method for identifying and exploring some of the key issues facing careers services in their work with students.

Bourdieu published widely on higher education (Bourdieu, 1988, Bourdieu, 1990, Bourdieu, 1996, Bourdieu, 1998) – a subject in which he had an 'abiding concern' (James, 1998b). Although Bourdieu's writing was based primarily within the context of the French higher education system, his work has been found to offer a wider 'generalisability' (Webb et al., 2002). Higher education, for Bourdieu, performs an important role in perpetuating social inequalities. It does this by 'consecrating' certain ways of acting and thinking which in turn highlight social differences (Webb et al., 2002, p.128).

Bourdieu's concepts, when applied in the context of this study, provide opportunities for exploring both student motivations and my own role as a researcher. As Webb et al (2000) have argued, it can be difficult for social agents – particularly when themselves located in the field in which they are researching – to reflect on, and to 'see' the forces that dispose them to act and behave as they do. Furthermore, I would argue that Bourdieu offers useful insights for careers work. As

discussed in section 2.4, research on the transition of students to employment has tended to polarize between agency-orientated approaches - those which stress the centrality of the individual (Hawkins, 1995, Harvey et al., 1997), and those which stress the structural factors, such as the interaction of local and national job markets (Hesketh, 2000). My concern is that this polarization has been detrimental in helping careers services understand both in conceptual and practical terms the nature of career transition, or indeed, the role of careers services. In so doing, the effectiveness of careers services has been reduced. Bourdieu, through his concept of *habitus* – a concept which aims to demonstrate that not only is the body in the social world but also ... the social world is in the body' (Reay, 1995) - offers the potential for overcoming the agency and structure dichotomy. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital will be examined the following sections.

### *Habitus*

Bourdieu defined habitus as 'derived from and part of the whole person or body' (Hodkinson, 1998). Describing habitus as 'meaning made body' Bourdieu claimed that its function,

'... ensures the active presence of past experience, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms ... habitus makes possible the free production of all the thoughts, perceptions and actions inherent in the particular conditions of its production – and only those' (James, 1998a)

The concept of habitus arose from Bourdieu's interest in exploring how individuals are 'moulded' out of social structures (Reay, 1995). Habitus, he claimed is acquired in the family and developed during childhood. In turn it is modified through exposure to new experiences and situations. As Scheuer (2003) argues,



**'Habitus is a structured principle, working predominantly through the body rather than through some sort of creative intellect; it has been accumulated over the past, but it addresses the future in terms of generating the individual's preferences, choices, perspectives, reasoning, and so on ... habitus is a product of individual life history, socialization and career trajectory (Scheuer, 2003).**

**Thus, while habitus reflects the social conditions in which it was initially constructed, it also carries within it the potential for generating new responses which in turn are capable of 'transcending the social conditions in which (the habitus) was produced' (Bourdieu, 1990). In this, Bourdieu attempts to reconcile the polarisation of structure and agency by claiming:**

**'Habitus provides a method for simultaneously analysing the experience of social agents and the objective structures which make this experience possible' (Bourdieu, quoted in Reay, 1988).**

**The concept of habitus offers several important dimensions for this study. First, habitus acknowledges that widening participation students' attitudes to higher education, their involvement, their identities as learners and their employment aspirations are to a large extent linked indivisibly to their 'life histories' and the social, economic and cultural forces acting upon them (Reay, 1995). In so doing it recognises that students enter higher education with their own unique pre-dispositions of thinking, feeling, evaluating, speaking and acting (Mayrhofer et al., 2002). Habitus, with its complex interplay between past and present, subjective and objective, thus offers a dynamic method for exploring students' lives (Grenfell and James, 1998).**

**Second, I feel that habitus as a 'durable system of dispositions' (Mayrhofer et al., 2002) offers an opportunity for avoiding some of the limitations contained in previous career-related research, which by limiting itself to questionnaires and surveys has been incapable of**

exploring the social and cultural 'disjuncture' which some students have experienced upon entering higher education. Bourdieu argued that agents do not, strictly speaking, always know what they are doing, and that it is this that gives what they do more meaning than they know (Jenkins, 2002). Rarely however has career-related research explored dimensions related to the unknown; instead research has tended to accept students' responses at face value (of this Bourdieu was skeptical).

Third, habitus 'lends itself to a focus on social inequalities, but one which demands a complex analysis that both recognises diversity in social groups and, at the same time, highlights the crucial importance of the context in which actions take place' (Reay, 1998b). This also is an important issue in this study bearing in mind the range of inequalities that widening participation students are likely to experience – both internally and externally to Liverpool Hope. On this theme, Bourdieu wrote about the 'misery of position' that people whose habitus was discordant with their position in the social field (Reay, 1995). 'Misery of position' is another concept that will be relevant to this study.

Fourth, habitus offers a conceptual approach for exploring student participation in HE. It does this by acknowledging that although habitus reflects 'an embodiment of structure' (Nash, 1996), students' decisions are likely to reflect a 'repertoire of schemata' which are being constantly re-evaluated and modified by new experiences. Through this interaction the 'life history of the individual shapes and is shaped by his/her 'common sense' experience' (Hodkinson, 1998).

Finally, while habitus is unique to individuals, sociologists have shown that in some cases a group habitus can exist between individuals sharing similar experiences or positions in society. Thus Reay (1998) argues for the existence of gendered habitus, which she claims represents:



'... the incorporation of the existing division of labour between the sexes, a division of labour which, for the most part, is accepted unquestionably by the majority of men and women' (Reay, 1998b).

### **'Field'**

If *habitus* provides a conceptual framework for exploring subjective issues such as the motivation of students to enrol in higher education, *field* focuses on the objective contexts in which they operate. Bourdieu defined field as a 'network or a configuration' which he saw existing between 'objectively defined' positions (Jenkins, 2002). In Bourdieu's terms, field relates to the social contexts in which practices take place (Mayrhofer et al., 2002). As such, field can be defined as a series of institutions, rules, rituals, conventions, categories, designations and titles which 'constitute an objective hierarchy and which authorise certain discourses and activities' (Webb et al., 2002). Fields operate by establishing 'determinations' upon those within them - be they individuals (agents) or organisations (institutions). Bourdieu views fields as 'historically generated systems of shared meanings' (Mayrhofer et al., 2002). At times Bourdieu describes field in terms of a game that is 'played' by agents; the difference with other games being that in this sense agents seldom recognise their involvement in the game. Bourdieu wrote:

'A field is not the product of a deliberate act of creation, and it follows rules or, better, regularities, that are not explicit and codified. Thus we have *stakes*, which are for the most part the product of the competition between players. We have an *investment in the game illusio* (from *ludus*, the game): players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur in their belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning. Players agree, by the mere fact of playing, and not by way of a "contract," that the game is worth playing, that it is "worth the candle," and this

*collusion* is the very basis of their competition (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996)

Higher education institutions can be thus conceptualised in terms of a field or game, for within institutions, it could be argued, are located various types of players (staff, students, administrators) each in possession of different forms of capital. Furthermore, as will be seen, widening participation students, as new players, are frequently so 'taken in' by the game that they are prepared to invest significant time and resources in the belief that the benefits to be accrued from higher education are 'worth the candle'.

Bourdieu conceptualised the relationship between field and habitus as operating in two ways: first, in terms of conditioning: the field, he argued, structures the habitus which itself is a product of the 'immanent necessity of the field' (Grenfell and James, 1998). Second, in terms of cognitive construction: habitus enables the individual to think of the field as a meaningful and worthwhile world – 'a world endowed with sense and value, in which it is worth investing one's practice' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996).

### *Cultural Capital*

A third metaphor used by Bourdieu in reference to his conceptual framework is the metaphor of the market. In markets, individuals (and organisations) compete for different types of 'product' which in turn are invested with differential levels of value. Yet, as Grenfell and James (1998) argue, this value is not a neutral or passive feature of the 'field'; instead it is a value containing a degree of power that can be used to buy other products within the 'field'. This power Bourdieu refers to as 'capital'.

Bourdieu identifies three forms of symbolic capital: economic, social and cultural. Economic capital is usually defined in financial terms but it can also apply to access to finance. Social capital 'exists as a network of lasting social relations' or, in other words, an individual's



sphere of contacts (Grenfell and James, 1998). The definition of cultural capital is very wide and includes material objects (which have symbolic value), as well as 'untouchable' but culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority (Harker et al., 1990). Cultural capital is produced by education and exists in three distinct forms which Grenfell and James (1998) summarise as: general educated character (accent, dispositions, learning etc); connected to objects (books, qualifications, machinery, dictionaries, etc); and connected to institutions – universities, libraries etc (Grenfell and James, 1998). Possession of 'capital' is for Bourdieu equivalent to holding a 'trump card' –

'... that is, master cards whose force varies depending on the game: just as the relative value of cards changes with each game, the hierarchy of the different species of capital (economic, social, cultural, symbolic) varies across the various fields ... there are cards that are valid, efficacious in all fields—these are the fundamental species of capital—but their relative value as trump cards is determined by each field and even by the successive states of the same field. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1996)

Capital thus tends to attract capital; hence students whom Brown and Scase (1994) described as possessing cultural capital sought by recruiters were more likely to be successful in job markets than those whose cultural capital was less marketable. Moreover, as more 'players' enter the game, the value of capital may become devalued, prompting players to seek other forms of capital to acquire.

The concept of capital is a key issue to be explored in this study. In entering the field of higher education widening participation students may be seeking, it could be argued, to enhance their positioning in employment fields by gaining educational capital in the form of a degree qualification. However, as Webb et al (2002) claim, the amount of power a person has in a field depends on that person's position in the field and the amount of capital he or she possesses.

Furthermore as the number of students entering higher education continues to rise the value of cultural capital in the form of qualifications could diminish – thus prompting recruiters to place greater emphasis on other forms of cultural capital such as extracurricular activities, membership of elite clubs and societies, foreign travel etc. Such a shift is likely to place some students (e.g. those from widening participation backgrounds) at a disadvantage (Brown and Scase, 1994, Brown et al., 2003, Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1997, Tett, 2000, Warhurst and Nickson, 2001). As Brown and Scase (1994) have argued, the search for new forms of cultural capital is beginning to redefine the skills and qualities that employers seek from graduates:

‘Dress, deportment, speech, skiing holidays, hobbies and interests are all incorporated in the creation of a personality package which must be sold in the job market’ ... Girls with a working-class Essex accent and who are not into power dressing are invariably excluded, irrespective of their academic abilities’  
(Brown and Scase, 1994)

The concept of cultural capital raised important issues in this study, particularly in terms of the compatibility of widening participation students’ cultural capital, and that emphasised by graduate recruiters (see Chapter 7).

### *Careership: ‘Pragmatic Rational Decisions’, ‘Turning Points’ and ‘Horizons for Action’*

‘Habitus’, ‘field’ and ‘cultural capital’ are evident in the ‘Careership’ model developed by Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997), and discussed further in subsequent literature (Hodgkinson, 1998, Hodgkinson, 2000, Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1993, Hodgkinson and Sparkes, 1997). ‘Careership’ offers an applied model for relating Bourdieu’s concepts to a career-specific context. It also accepts that career decisions can only be fully understood in terms of the life histories of those making them, or in other words, in terms of their habitus, their interaction with



significant others and within the 'culture in which the individual has lived and is living' (Hodkinson, 1998).

'Careership' involves three strands, which Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) view as interdependent. Using Bourdieu's 'game' metaphor, careership states that 'everything takes place within a macro-context with social, political, economic, cultural, geographical and historical dimensions' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Within these dimensions lie the 'field', 'with its interactions, power struggles, alliances and negotiations'. In the field, people make 'pragmatically rational decisions'. This term is significant for it arose out of Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) research with young job seekers. They found, contrary to established career theories, that young people did not 'make decisions as they were supposed to'. Instead, such decisions were often 'pragmatic rather than systematic'. In other words, career decisions were context-related, based on partial information and, crucially, 'could not be separated from respondents' 'family background, culture and life histories' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997).

The young people studied by Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) were found to make career decisions within 'horizons for action,' which they define as the perspectives on and possibilities for action given in any field (Hodkinson, 1998). Again, this concept offers useful potential for attempting to understand how students' backgrounds, habitus and relationships with other people can influence and to some extent define career choices, making some careers seem appropriate and others inconceivable.

The final strand within Careership relates to 'turning points'. Again, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) are critical of established career models which portray careers using metaphors such as 'ladders' and 'escalators' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Instead they argue that careers are shaped by routines and turning points, and that turning points are both preceded and followed by periods of routine, which themselves are located within the field and the macro-context

(Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). In most careers, periods of routine and turning points are inter-related, so that neither can be understood fully without the other. Separation between routine and turning points is often 'arbitrary', for in practice, 'the pathway from turning-point to turning-point can be predictable and smooth or irregular and idiosyncratic'.

Three types of 'turning points' are identified: *structural*, such as reaching statutory retirement age, or graduation; *self-initiated*, when an individual instigates the turning point; and *externally-initiated*, when a turning point is driven by the actions of external agencies or forces (such as compulsory redundancies). The implications of turning points for this study are explored in Chapter 6.

### *Positioning Theory*

The final component that has underpinned the conceptual framework has been the concept of 'positioning' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999). The term 'position' has been defined as:

... a complex cluster of generic personal attributes, structured in various ways, which impinges on the possibilities of interpersonal, inter-group and even intra-personal action throughout some assignment of such rights, duties and obligations to an individual as are sustained by the cluster (Harre and Langenhove, 1999)

The concept of positioning therefore assumes that identities are produced by socially and culturally available discourses. These discourses as Burr (2000) argues provide individuals with conceptual repertoires by which people (and groups) may represent themselves and others. Crucially, every discourse has implicit within it a number of subject positions located within it – and each of these subject positions has numerous implications for those who are located within them (Burr, 2000).



The use of positioning theory in this study has been adopted for several reasons. First, the concept of positioning, 'the study of local moral orders as ever shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights and obligations of speaking and acting' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999), views the individual and his or her self perception as being essentially a negotiated one, a joint product which emerges from social interaction (Burr, 2000). This would seem to offer the potential of exploring the different 'positions' occupied by widening participation students when operating in the higher education field – thus linking positioning conceptually with Bourdieu's framework.

Second, positioning theory suggests an approach informed by social constructivism. This assumes that people act intentionally, but not always consciously and that what people are to themselves and others is a product of a lifetime of interpersonal interactions 'superimposed over a very general ethological endowment' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999). As Burr (2000) argues, an agent's subjective experiences, of being the person that they take themselves to be is constructed around a totality of 'subject positions' – some permanent, some temporary, some fleeting – that people adopt in discourses. Positioning theory offers the potential for exploring the various discourses, which operate across higher education (and HE institutions) and the impact of discursive processes in terms of the positioning of students – particularly, in this case, those from widening participation backgrounds.

In practical terms, positioning theory offers a useful approach for examining the various positions adopted by students. Positioning theory, according to Rigano and Ritchie (2001, p.742) can be effective when analysing research-based dialogue. Drawing on the work of Harre` and Langenhove (1999) they argue that the structure of conversations is 'tri-polar' consisting of positions, storylines and speech-acts. As such, narratives which take place collaboratively between people can be seen to draw on a range of cultural structures; furthermore, as storylines unfold participants can be seen

to be 'constantly engaged in positioning themselves and others' through their discursive actions (Rigano and Ritchie, 2001).

In some discourses, people select and assume positions for themselves (reflexive positioning); in others positions are allocated (interactive positioning). Positioning affords a way of looking at both how widening participation students are subject to discourses and how they attempt to negotiate these discourses in other aspects of their lives. Positioning is a more dynamic and interactive alternative to the relatively static concept of roles (Rigano and Ritchie, 2001). Positions are 'fluid', frequently changing, evolving and being renegotiated as personal stories unfold in storylines. Positions, as Harre and Langenhove argue assume that in conversations people adopt different positions and that these positions have certain roles assigned to them. Different roles have different rights to make certain claims in conversations depending on their positioning and the interplay of other contexts. As Rigano and Ritchie write:

'So when we are interviewing someone and asking them to provide their interpretation of the world we are really asking them to adopt a position and describe what they see from a vantage point of that position and in terms of the particular images, metaphors, storylines and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned' (Rigano and Ritchie, 2001).

During the empirical research phase positioning theory was particularly useful in helping me reflect on and analyse the various positions adopted by widening participation students e.g. 'mature person', 'conscientious student', 'day tripper' etc. and the extent that such positions might have changed during the transition from higher education to employment. It also provided a conceptual framework for addressing the issue of my relationship with the students.



# **Chapter 3: The Research Methodology**

## **The research issues**

As a qualitative research study, the aim of the research was to encourage an opportunity sample of widening opportunities students at Liverpool Hope University College to articulate and present their perspectives upon their experiences at the institution. Focusing down, the concern ultimately was to gain an understanding of the current role and future potential of careers education for such widening opportunities students. To that end, the initial research crystallized around three main issues:

- Why do students from widening participation backgrounds enrol in higher education?
- How do students from widening participation backgrounds experience higher education at Liverpool Hope?
- What are the implications of the study for the careers service, both at Hope and across the wider sector?

Consequently, after explaining my research philosophy, this chapter describes, explains and justifies the research techniques chosen for the study, as well as their application.

## **My Philosophy of Research**

Hodkinson writes (Hodkinson et al., 1998) that a commonly held view of qualitative research is that theorizing should arise from the data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This was my philosophical position when setting out on this study, but as the study progressed, I realised that such a 'grounded theory' approach was too simplistic. I did not approach the study with an 'open' mind – nor as Hodkinson (1998) argues would it be possible to do so. The choice of research topic, the selection of the research issues, choice of research techniques and the choice of questions asked within the techniques were

'coloured' by my prior understandings. It thus could be argued that I approached the study from within my own 'horizons for action', influenced by my own habitus and the related positions that I occupy both as a careers practitioner and a member of staff at Liverpool Hope.

Consequently, a social constructionist philosophy underpins the research, despite the problematic definition of social constructionism, or a social constructionist approach (Burr 2000). At the same time, I am not implying a strictly relativistic approach based on the extreme claim that the world is entirely illusory (Stake, 1995). Rather, Burr (2000) suggests that the following 'positions' can be identified as adhering to a social constructionist approach:

*i. A critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge*

Social constructionism invites practitioners to be critical of the view that observations of the world can (or should) yield its true nature, either without problems or without being contested (Burr, 2000). The study therefore attempts to adopt a critical stance towards widening participation and widening participation students, the role of careers services and the nature of career theory, seeing these as open to contestation.

*ii. Historical and cultural specificity*

The categories and concepts used by people to understand the world and the environments in which they operate are historically and culturally specific. Furthermore, not only are these understandings specific to particular cultures and periods of history, they are themselves products of that culture and history and interact with the prevailing social and economic conditions prevailing at that time. When trying to understand why for example, women from under-represented parts of Liverpool enter higher education at certain points in their lives, considerations of the historical and cultural role of women in (Liverpool) society, the impact of family role models, and



so on, will need to be taken into consideration. Social constructionism, therefore attempts to see such students within the context of their lives rather than decontextualising them with comparisons with other cultures and with other times.

### *iii. Social processes sustain knowledge*

Social constructionism accepts that people construct their own understandings of the world through interactions with others (hence 'social' and 'construction'). As we interact primarily through language, language and discourses within language, assume considerable importance for any version of reality is never the product of objective, scientific observation, but of the 'social processes and interactions in which people are constantly engaged with each other' (Burr, 2000).

Crucially, social constructionism views language and thought as bound inseparably together, with language providing the prism for thought and perceptions. Language is the means by which people experience themselves and others and is not a 'simple reflecting mirror'. We will see in this study, for instance, that the term 'career' has been found to have numerous meanings (including no meaning) when utilised with different groups of students. For students from widening participation backgrounds, without previous access or exposure to such concepts, the contestable and ever-changing nature of such terminology can lead to struggle, conflict and, potentially, change or resistance.

The use of social constructionism in this study also permits the adoption of a critical discourse approach, defined as an attempt, 'to stand apart from the prevailing order of the world and ask how that order came about' (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). Critical discourse research, as with social constructionism, offers an attempt to 'cut through' surface appearances by locating the issues being investigated in their historical and structural contexts (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). Using Shacklock and Smyth's (1998) 'critical frames'

as a point of reference, my aim in adopting a social constructionist, critical discourse approach has provided a basis for:

- a) exploring the experiences and aspirations of a social group (widening participation students) whose participation in the field of higher education has been, and remains, historically and culturally marginalized;
- b) approaching the research in ways that are 'interruptive' (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998) of taken for granted social practices – in other words, to problematize the issues of participation and aspiration in higher education from different perspectives from those currently and historically applied;
- c) providing a framework to allow students to state their own positions but also to elicit those positions where they have not been conceptualised or theorized before ;
- d) developing themes and categories from the research data, but to treat that data as being constructed and being inherently problematic and open to reinterpretation;
- e) editing my own role into the text without presuming researcher-neutrality;
- f) being reflexive of the study's own 'limitations, distortions and agenda' (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998); and
- g) being concerned about the possible impact of the research in terms of its capacity to produce more effective, equitable and appropriate relationships.

Sections 3.4 – 3.6 will explore how this philosophy of research has been instrumental in the design and implementation of the research methods.

### **3.2. The Research methodology**

The section begins with a section on why a predominantly qualitative, interpretive methodology was selected. The section then goes on to consider:



- The actual methods used:
- The sequences in which they were introduced, and
- The numbers and patterns of students involved.

The section will conclude with an account of how the study was piloted.

### *A Qualitative Research strategy*

It was considered important to utilize research methods that would enable the exploration and analysis of the personal views, feelings, aspirations and life histories of widening access students (Woods 1996). Consistent with qualitative research, interpretive researchers assume that there is no objective 'reality out there which exists irrespective of people' (Bassey, 1999). Instead, reality is a 'construct of the human mind', one which is constantly being interpreted and reinterpreted by individuals (even those who are engaged in similar tasks or who are from similar backgrounds). Interpretive researchers also accept that by acting within a situation they may change it.

On this theme Bassey (1999, p.44) states, 'the public world is positivist; the private world is interpretive'. Public positivist assumptions (e.g. 'degrees lead to better careers') have to be problematised, for researchers too can be confronted with new complexities, uncertainties and inconsistency (e.g. what does the term 'career' mean? Can it be assumed that degrees lead to better careers for *all* students?).

Nationally, higher education careers services do tend to operate in a predominantly positivist paradigmatic world consisting of labour markets, economic intelligence, employer recruitment strategies, institutional league tables and destination surveys. Careers work too is frequently presented in the positivist language of 'transferable skills' and 'employability' (AGR, 2002, Adenekan and Garner, 2003, Harris, 2001, DFEE, 2000, Rowley and Purcell, 2001, Tysome, 1997,

Tysome; 2003). When working directly with students, however, this positivist emphasis seems to shift to an interpretive paradigm, one which accepts differences in perception, interpretation and language.

Bassey (1999) accepts that in practice such working categories are likely to be 'fuzzy' and that a certain amount of mobility is likely to take place in most research projects. None the less, a predominantly interpretive paradigm has been adopted in this research – particularly as the research uses an ethnographic case study approach based on eliciting, recording and interpreting students' perceptions and constructs of their situations in groups and individually. Most of this data, with the exception of the questionnaires, was elicited verbally, though analyzed with the aid of a computer programme.

### *Ethnography*

A primary objective of an ethnographic approach is studying and engaging with a 'singularity' or a distinct group of people. The research seeks to be investigative and will utilise the researcher as the prime investigator. The research will investigate a series of leads arising out of the data – LeCompte & Schensul (1999) using ethnographic methods such as 'hunches', 'guesses', 'initial hypotheses', 'models and concepts'. A long-term goal is to try to build local theories, which might eventually be tested and adapted elsewhere. In other words, using another of LeCompte & Schensul's (1999) definitions, the research seeks to take,

'... the position that human behaviour and the ways in which people construct and make meanings of their worlds and their lives are highly variable and locally specific'  
(LeCompte and Schensul, 1999)

The ethnographic approach is also consistent with the use of one to one interviews, observations and focus / discussion groups. In so doing the study seeks to utilize the 'concept of culture' – the beliefs, behaviour, norms, attitudes, aspirations, social arrangements and



forms of expression that form a 'describable pattern in the lives of members of a community or institution' (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999).

### *Case study*

According to Hamel (Hamel et al., 1993) the goal of a case study is to 'reconstruct and analyse a case from a sociological perspective'. For this reason, Hamel suggests a case studies should be considered an approach rather than a method (Hamel et al., 1993). There were several reasons for adopting a case study approach in this study. Case studies can be particularly effective when the goal of the research is to 'strive to highlight the features and attributes of social life'(Hamel et al., 1993).

Second, the study examines a 'singularity' - a definable group of pre-selected, final-year widening access students. This singularity is located within a 'definable, localised boundary of space and time' (Bassey, 1999) (in other words, the time period during which the students move through the final-year of their degree programme and up to six months after graduation). Third, the research has been carried out within a 'naturalised' context (Liverpool Hope and later, the students' places of employment). Fourth, the objective for undertaking the study was primarily to help inform the 'judgements and decisions of local practitioners and, possibly regional policy makers such as the North West Regional Development Agency (NWRDA). Making use of the case study for practical, theoretical or strategic reasons is for Bassey (1999) an important point, for he also argues that case studies offer the potential for researchers to explore significant features of the case being studied and to create 'plausible interpretations' of what is found.

Finally, as Bassey (1999) suggests, case study research can provide a useful 'audit trail' by which other researchers may validate or challenge one's findings or alternatively, construct their own

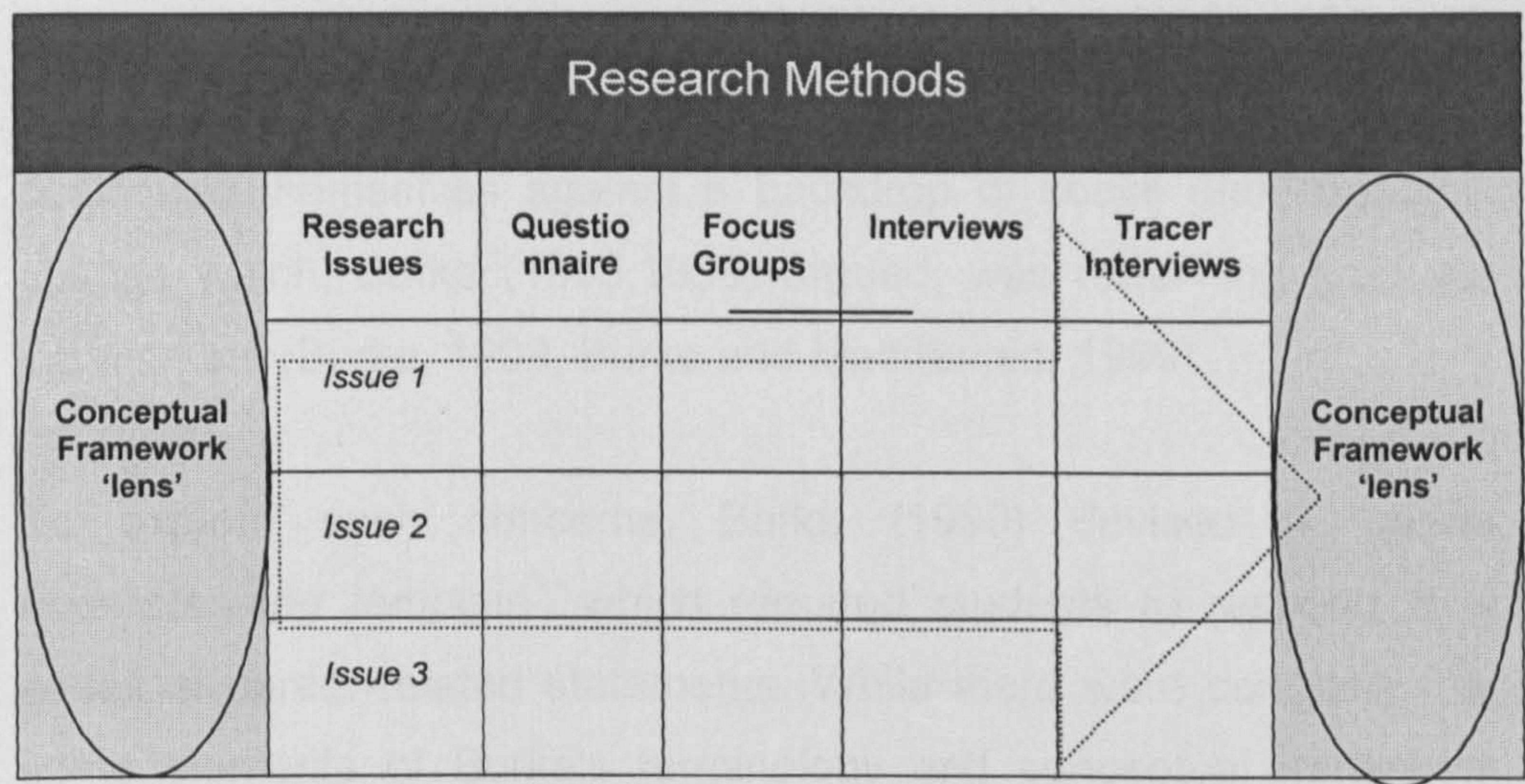


alternative arguments. My long-term aim for the research is that it may prove useful for Liverpool Hope – primarily the careers service but also other departments dealing with widening access students. An ‘audit trail’ will therefore be essential if the research is to achieve a level of generalisability.

### Triangulation of Data

The research utilized three methods: questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. These methods were selected in order to provide a level of ‘triangulation’ (see below) and validity (Holliday, 2002). That is, a matrix was used when designing the research approach to ensure that the research methods related to both the conceptual framework and the research issues. This matrix also provided a useful guide when developing questionnaires to be used in the interviews, tracer interviews and focus groups. Figure 3.1 offers a visual representation of this matrix. It illustrates how the conceptual framework acted as a ‘lens’ through which to shape the three research issues, which in turn were explored throughout the three research methods. Data gathered from the research methods too was analyzed through the ‘lens’ of the conceptual framework.

Figure 3.1. Relationship between conceptual framework, methodology and issues





The three methods – questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews – were carried out at two points: during students' final college year and six months after their graduation). According to Holliday (2002) triangulation is 'normally thought of as increasing the validity of qualitative research by getting and comparing multiple perceptions of the same phenomenon' (Holliday, 2002). Thus, in developing the methodology, a form of 'triangulation' was utilised whereby data gathered from the questionnaires could be 'tested' and/or further explored in the focus groups. In turn, data from focus groups could be explored with students within the interview contexts.

## **The Research Methods**

### *Questionnaire*

The objective of the questionnaire was to provide data that would permit an initial identification of various 'positions' taken by widening participation students in relation to their motivations to enter higher education, their experiences whilst there, and career orientations and aspirations (Harre and Langenhove, 1999). Once identified these positions could be developed and explored further in the focus groups and interviews. The concept behind the questionnaire was initially informed by research undertaken by Burke et al (1998,1999) with Canadian business students, which sought to explore how students positioned themselves against a backdrop of social and economic change which, Burke (1998,1999) argued, was redefining graduate job markets (Burke, 1998, Burke and Macdemiid, 1999).

To explore such concerns, Burke (1998) devised a '*career understanding template*', which required students to respond to a series of career-related statements. While there were concerns that some elements of Burke's terminology and conceptual framework was overly deterministic (particularly the seemingly 'given' use of terminology such as 'career' and 'job security') it seemed possible

that such a questionnaire-framework, if developed carefully in accordance to the research issues, might provide an insight into widening participation students' career-related 'positions'.

In designing the questionnaire (see Appendix 2) the key objective was to ensure that the question fields related directly to the research issues of the study. To ensure the research issues were properly addressed, and that the questionnaire was structured appropriately, the following matrix was used as a checklist.

Table 3.2. Questionnaire design matrix

Research Issue	Target data	Question No.
1) Factors motivating widening participation students to enrol in HE	Pre-HE qualifications; parents' education background; 'significant others'; Family responsibilities; key factors	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
2) Widening participation students' experience higher education: career aspirations and orientations	Work experience / commitments; hours worked; extent to which positions have changed	9, 10, 11, 12
3) Implications for careers service	Hours worked by students; type of current work; career orientations	All – specifically 10 – 13

The questionnaire also provided a method for exploring certain aspects of the conceptual framework with larger numbers of students than might be accessible in interviews and focus groups. Two examples stand out. First, I was interested in 'career orientations' of the students. Consequently, a question relating to career aspirations was developed using Brown & Scase's (1994) career orientations model. Students were presented with eight statements each relating to 'views about the future'. Each statement was to be ranked in order of importance by scoring it on a 1 – 5 basis.

The second example relates to the incorporation of positioning theory within the questionnaire (Questions 8 and 9). Question 8, for instance, asks the students why they enrolled at Liverpool Hope and



to rank in order of preference fourteen statements, each relating to different enrolment 'triggers' for enrolment. Question 9 then required students to reflect if the importance (i.e. the ranking) of any of the fourteen factors had changed during the intervening period in which they had been enrolled at the college. In using these questions it was anticipated that it might be possible to identify students engaged in a process of active re-positioning of themselves within the wider discourses of higher education.

The questionnaire was piloted in December 2002 with 37 final-year B.Sc. Mathematics students. This group was selected partly for convenience (I taught a module on the programme) and partly because it was known in the past to have been an active recruiter of widening participation students. The completed questionnaires were found subsequently to be representative of entry profiles ranging from 'traditional' A' level routes to Access programmes. The piloting process, however, also identified a number of inconsistencies in the questionnaire that were corrected. Students, for instance, were asked to state if they had children when the main factor was that of being the main carer. Questions relating to students' educational backgrounds (and those of their families') were also found to be imprecise. Re-writing these questions resulted in a clearer, more effective questionnaire (see Appendix 2).

The amended version of the questionnaire was administered between January and February 2003 to approximately 150 students on courses representing each of the main (non-Education) academic deaneries (Science, Social Science, Business and Information Technology). Sixty-seven were completed and returned. The data was collated via a spreadsheet from which a number of tables and graphs were drawn up (see Appendix 4).

## *Focus groups*

Krueger & Casey (2000) describe focus groups as 'carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment' (Krueger and Casey, 2000). The focus groups in the research too were carefully planned, though the sample was an opportunity one as the students were invited to participate voluntarily. The Focus groups took place during semester five (first half of the final undergraduate year) with an average number of five students in attendance. Typically, focus group duration was between sixty and ninety minutes. Most followed a set questionnaire developed from Aston's (2001) questionnaire framework (see Appendix 6). Apart from facilitating the groups, my role was to prompt and reflect back to students, as far as possible, their own comments and opinions – a form of validation of response.

Students that attended focus groups were chosen on the basis of their questionnaire responses regarding their educational qualifications and source of that qualification. Consequently, the majority of students attending were from Access programmes, though several participants had enrolled without any formal qualifications directly via company training programmes.

By selecting students on the basis of their pre-degree qualifications, the focus groups had in the potential to attract students from a range of undergraduate programmes. In practice, focus group members were drawn from an academic spectrum consisting of Business Studies, Information Technology, Sociology, and Psychology. These subjects, besides being among the largest in the college have in recent years recruited large numbers of students from access programmes (Longden, 2003b). These subjects also reflect the options taught on *Reach Out Access*. As such, many students entered the college via subjects that they had previously studied.



The most common age band of those attending focus groups was 36 - 40. Most of those attending were female<sup>6</sup>, most had children and most indicated they were the main carers (see Appendix 4 for a summary of collated questionnaire data). The majority of those attending were the first in their family to enter higher education. As such, the groups might be viewed as fairly representative of widening participation students across the sector (Reay et al., 2002, Reay and Ball, 1997, Tonks and Farr, 2003).

### *On-Course Interviews*

Robson (1993) argues that interviews can be particularly effective when combined with other types of research. I was keen to use individual interviews for several reasons. First, there were some concerns that focus groups, while on one level effective, had been 'hijacked' in some cases by dominant members of the groups – a point warned against by Krueger (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Preventing this from happening had been difficult – particularly when some focus groups contained students who were well known to others in the group and therefore I considered, were established in social orders external to the research. Second, there was a need to find a way to validate, or check the data as it was emerging from the focus groups. Interviews, particularly those on a one-to-one basis, seemed the best way of doing this.

It has been claimed that interviewing provides researchers with some of the best ways for modifying lines of enquiry, following up new themes or ideas, and investigating underlying motives (Robson, 1993, Bassey, 1999, Holliday, 2002). The interviews were easier to organise than focus groups, and all were tape recorded (as were focus groups), and transcribed in full. An example of an interview transcript can be observed in Appendix 7.

---

<sup>6</sup> This is probably an accurate representation of the student body at Liverpool Hope, which, in 2003 had a female to male ratio of 72:28.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured, using an interview schedule developed from Aston (2001) (see Appendix 1). The interviews were 'interactive' in nature, meaning that the schedule was frequently modified and in one case abandoned. Despite this, the interviewer / researcher maintained control and managed the agenda. However it is worth noting that 'informant interviews' – when the agenda for the interview is set almost exclusively by the interviewee (Robson, 1993)– also took place on several occasions when students from the sample frame made unscheduled visits to my office to talk to me about issues that had affected them since our last meeting. Such experiences suggest that in practice, these two approaches to interviewing are not mutually exclusive.

### *Tracer Interviews*

Tracer interviews took place with 12 students up to six months after the completion of their courses. The tracer component was included for two reasons. First, the aim was to explore the extent that students' 'positions' on career aspirations, career motivation and reasons for enrolling in higher education had changed, or being reinforced by their post higher education experiences. Second, it has been claimed that the significance and poignancy of the transition from higher education to work has to date been largely ignored and underestimated by educational researchers, but that for students this can be a time 'fraught with stress, anxiety, shock, fear, uncertainty, loss, loneliness, depression and feelings of low self worth' (Perrone and Vickers, 2003). Apart from quantitative research data, both careers services and higher education institutions have a limited understanding of this transition from a student perspective. Introducing a tracer study was therefore considered to be an opportunity for obtaining valuable data. Tracer interviews took place in a range of settings. Because most students were in employment, several were held in employer premises. Others took place 'after hours' in college.



# Chronology

All the fieldwork took place during the period January 2002 to March 2004. The schedule is summarized in Table 3.3. Consistent with the research approach the research schedule began by administering the questionnaire with large numbers of students. From the 67 questionnaires returned it was possible, by analysing the data, to identify those who had entered via widening participation routes. This data was used to use to establish focus groups that were completed by December after being piloted in February 2002.

Table 3.3. Research chronology

Year	Month	Research activity
2002	January	Questionnaire piloted to 37 final year B.Sc. Mathematics students
	January	Questionnaire administered to 150 students across deaneries; 67 returned; analysis forms basis of focus groups
	February	Focus Group 1 (pilot)
	March	Focus Group 2
	March	Focus Group 3
	October	Focus Group 4
2003	January	Interview (pilot)
	January - March	Interviews held with 11 students
	December	Tracer interview piloted
2004	Jan – March	Tracer interviews held with 10 graduates in various locations

From the focus groups, a smaller group of students were invited to attend in-depth, one to one interviews. These were piloted in January 2003 and were held with a further 11 students in the period leading up to September 2003. In December 2003, the pilot tracer interview took place with a 2002 graduate. Once amendments to the interview schedule had taken place a further 10 tracer interviews were held with 2003 graduates during the months January – March 2004.

A total of 28 final-year undergraduate students were involved in the post-questionnaire phase of the research. All were 'mature', i.e. aged over 25. Students were divided equally between males and females and selected on the basis of the route into higher education (as indicated on their questionnaires). Appendix 8 provides a detailed summary of student participation across the three research methods – focus groups, interviews and tracer interviews. All students participating in the research were promised anonymity. Consequently a coding system has been deployed to protect individual identities. Each student has been allocated a number, 1 – 28 prefixed with the letter F (female) or M (male). Where appropriate, students have been issued with pseudonyms to protect identities.

### **The Analysis of data**

The research methods generated large quantities of data, so much so that at times the sheer quantity of data threatened to swamp the process. Grounded theory initially seemed to offer one way of dealing with this (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) for as West (1996, p.31) writes, in this method,

'Observations, sentences, paragraphs are deconstructed, giving each incident a specific name, and each part of the material is coded and classified'.

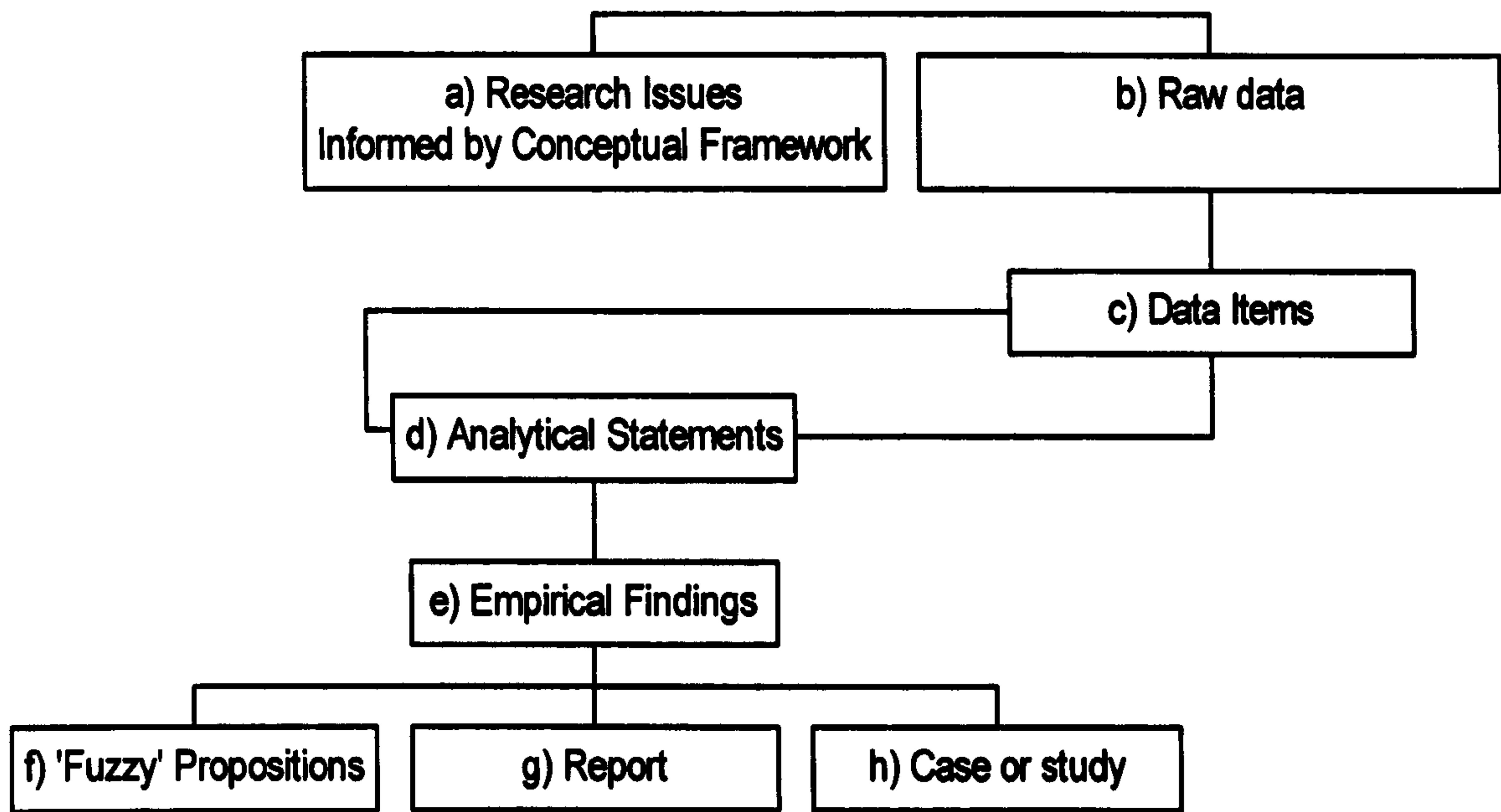
After experimenting with grounded theory when analysing data from the pilot interview, I became concerned that the 'emerging theory' failed to acknowledge the implicit theories and conceptual framework which had guided, informed and structured the study (a similar criticism is made of grounded theory by Silverman, 2001, p.71). Like West (1996) and others I was anxious to avoid the analysis 'degenerating' into a 'fairly empty building of categories' (Silverman, 2001).



The approach therefore used was developed around the case study method summarised by Bassey (1999, pp84, 85). I have attempted to illustrate my approach to analysis by using the flow chart represented in Table 3.4, which was adapted from that developed by Bassey (1999, p.85). According to the flow chart, the research issues (a) were drawn up with reference to the conceptual framework and through the literature review and, in addition, as through the application of the questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and tracer interviews. This led to the accumulation of raw data (b). Raw data was stored electronically (this section will go on to discuss the use of the software package QSR NUD IST) each with a locatable reference.

Reflection on the data items led to writing of draft analytical statements (c) stored in the form of memos and notes. In turn, these draft analytical statements were re-tested against the data items (d) to be either amended or discarded. As Bassey (1999, p.85) writes, stages (c) and (d) represent an 'iterative process aimed to get the most from the data'. When this process was completed the analytical statements could be viewed as empirical findings (e). For Bassey (1999) these findings could have several applications – being offered as (f) 'fuzzy' propositions in (g) reports or surveys, evaluations or (h) case reports.

Diagram 3. 4. From Research Questions to Empirical and Case Reports



Source: Bassey, 1999, p.85

Diagram 3.4 illustrates the main processes of analysis undertaken in the study; however within each of these stages specific actions were undertaken. These are listed below.

*Qualitative Data analysis 1*

Each interview, tracer interview and focus group was tape-recorded and transcribed according to oral history conventions, which seeks to 'record people's words in full, in the order spoken' (West, 1996, p.29). Copies of transcripts were made available to students who requested them. Each transcript was then stored in a separate computer file and analysed using the software programme QSR NUD IST (version 5). This software has been designed specifically for qualitative research projects and offers a platform for managing, coding, categorising and interpreting large amounts of data (Gahan and Hannibal, 1999).

Using the software I was able to re-read the transcripts, drawing out key words, comparing sections with sections and coding sections of data within the context of the research issues. Analytical statements, or memos were written on these 'data items' recording specific



observations and positions. These statements were filed along with the transcripts and allocated separate codes. This data was then subjected to a content analysis from which a number of categories emerged, such as 'reasons for enrolling', 'turning points', 'significant others' etc. As well as allowing categories to emerge from the data (Dick, 2002) the analysis was also influenced by the conceptual framework, for example evidence emerged to suggest that some students displayed preferences for the 'socially committed' orientation described by Brown and Scase (1994). 'Turning points' that had occurred to the students during their lives (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) were recorded before progressing on to the second analytical stage.

### *Qualitative Data Analysis 2*

The second cycle of analysis focused on exploring the most common categories to have emerged from the data and relating them to the research issues and conceptual framework. From this interpretation the empirical findings of the study would emerge. This data was then reviewed in the light of the literature review carried out as part of the research (Chapter Two). The discussion and conclusions of the data in the light of the literature review are provided in Chapter 6 and 7.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on how data was obtained and analysed. Chapter 4 will provide an example of an applied example of this analysis before the actual data is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

# **Chapter 4: The Analysis of the Qualitative Data**

## **Introduction**

Chapter 4 contains examples of the analysis of data obtained from the focus groups and individual interviews. Two research transcripts will be discussed in detail. The first relates to a focus group that took place in October 2002 – at the beginning of the students' final academic year. The second sample transcript is a tracer interview carried out with a graduate in January 2004. Both transcripts are available unabridged and free of annotation in Appendices 5 & 7.

In analysing transcripts, a composite form of discourse analysis was utilised, given that there is no singular critical discourse analytic way of collecting or analysing data (Wodak and Meyer, 2002). The benefits of discourse analysis lie in its ability to seek validity through reflexivity rather than seeking 'objective' external truths. Discourse analysis, it has been claimed, is always explicit about its own position and its own involvement in the research (Wodak and Meyer, 2002). This again would seem appropriate given my own involvement as a careers practitioner at Liverpool Hope. The approach to discourse analysis taken is consistent with the social constructionist, interpretive framework adopted of the study. As the transcripts are rich in data, the analysis has been structured to relate closely to the central research issues.

## **The Focus Group Transcript**

*Focus Group IV* took place in college on 08/10/02. 7 final-year students attended (codes: M5; F8; F9; F17; F18; F19; F20). Of these, all but one (M5) was female. Three of the group (F8, F9, F20) had attended the pilot focus group eight months earlier. The full transcript for Focus Group IV can be found in Appendix 5. Table 4.1 provides brief biographical data on the participants. All of the students were



aged over 30, whilst six of the seven (F9, F17, F18, F19, F20) entered Liverpool Hope via Reach Out programmes. Student M5 was currently studying on a part-time Reach Out degree programme; F8 entered via A levels which she took at a Liverpool Hope collaborative 'night school' prior to applying to higher education.

Table 4.1 Biographical data relating to Focus Group IV participants

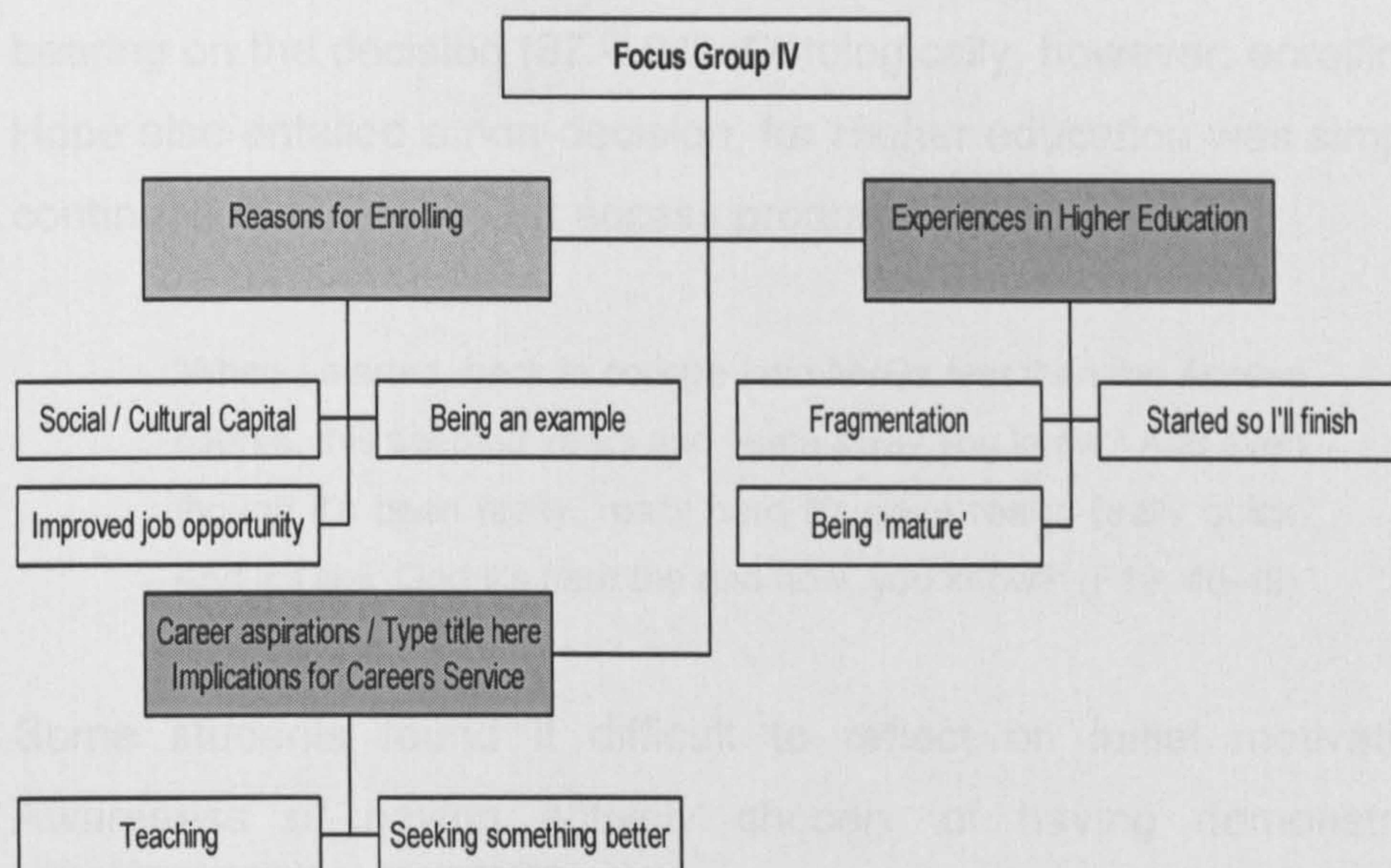
Code	Participants' Biographical Data
M5	Male aged 41-45, part-time B.A American Studies & Geography. Enrolled via Reach Out.
F8	Female aged 36-40, B.Sc. Sociology & IT. Enrolled via part-time A levels at local community college run in conjunction with Hope.
F9	Female aged 36 – 40, B.Sc. Sociology & IT. Enrolled via Reach Out.
F17	Female aged 31-35, B.A. English & IT. Enrolled via Reach Out.
F18	Female aged 41-45, B.A. English & IT. Enrolled via Reach Out
F19	Female aged 41-45, B.Sc. Psychology & Sports Studies. Enrolled via Reach Out
F20	Female aged 41-45, enrolled on B.Sc. IT & Sociology. Enrolled via Reach Out

The transcript was analysed using 'QSR NUD\*IST' (version 5) software. This entailed coding words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in relation to the research issues. The codes were linked directly to 'tree nodes' formed around the research issues (see Diagram 4.2). In addition to providing a mechanism for coding data, QSR software also enabled me to search, locate and compare specific data. This facility was helpful, particularly when assessing the frequency that certain terms such as 'career' and 'access' had been used during the focus group (and by whom).

Diagram 4.2 illustrates the framework around which the analysis was structured. The three research issues are represented in the shaded boxes. A number of sub-categories were identified which are presented in Diagram 4.2.



Diagram 4.2. Focus Group IV: Category formation



### *Reasons for enrolling*

Higher education for the students was articulated primarily in terms of academic credentials vocationally relevant to future occupational rewards. This motivation often was interwoven within complex life events that provided an impetus for action:

'Because you know, my marriage broke up and I moved from Scotland from a big house, he had really good money and I come back living with two kids in a flat and it was desperate, and I remember walking with the pram and thinking, is this it? And then I went back to college to do something – not to get here – but just to get out of the flat.

(F19: 339 – 443)

'*Just to get out of the flat*', indicates a pragmatic but 'forced turning point' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). As with other studies on widening participation (Reay, 1998a, Reay et al., 2002) the decision to enrol at Liverpool Hope was influenced by geographically limited 'horizons for action'. Liverpool Hope was local and convenient; and had a reputation for being 'very good for mature students ...' (F19:



181<sup>7</sup>). Hope also offered students a range of financial support packages, including hardship funds, which may have had some bearing on the decision (87 – 91). Ontologically, however, enrolling at Hope also entailed a non-decision, for Higher education was simply a continuation of Reach Out access programmes:

'When I started, back in college I did NVQs first then the Access course, this seemed years and years away you know? And even though it's been really, really hard it's gone really, really quick. And it's like, God it's near the end now, you know?' (F19: 46-49)

Some students found it difficult to reflect on initial motivations. Awareness of having actively chosen, of having demonstrated agency, was not always evident:

'I don't think you really think about it do you? I think you just want to get on that degree and you get to your final year and you think, 'Oh I've got to work now,' and you do and it's only when you come to your final year and you realise what you're actually working for and you can actually carry on and go further because you wouldn't even contemplate something like that when you're doing your Access. You just think, 'Oh my God, that degree, I've got to pass that first'. You're just blinkered aren't you?' (F17: 58 – 64)

The issue of ontological 'choice' is important. Ball et al (2002) claim widening participation students reveal 'choice biographies' when entering HE. The alternative to a 'choice biography' is the 'normal biography', which Ball et al (2002) define as 'linear, anticipated and predictable, non-reflexive transitions, often gender and class specific, rooted in well-established life-worlds and often driven by an absence of decisions (Ball et al., 2002)'. For Ball et al (2002) 'choice' biographies represent a tension between 'option versus freedom and legitimation versus coercion'. Agency is strongly articulated in 'choice biographies', with the future either 'unimagined or highly generic - a good job' (Ball et al., 2002).

---

<sup>7</sup> F19:181 – this annotation relates to the identity of the student being quoted (F19) and the line(s) in which the quotation can be found in the transcript (Appendix 5).

The potential for higher education to 're-position' students socially and culturally is evident in the transcript from their discussion of leisure time, such as TV viewing:

'When I was doing my access course one of my tutors said, 'Once you start getting back into education, once you're in that frame of mind, you won't be watching your soaps and you won't be doing this.' But when you're going once a week it's not too bad. But here I haven't got a clue who are the people on *Brookside*!' (F19: 363 - 366).

The above quotation offers an insight also into cultural capital. The comment was made in response to a question on the impact of higher education on students' home lives (331-332). The 'narrative' can be interpreted in at least two complementary ways. Studying can both leave little time for 'normal' social pursuits such as watching television; and also help students transform their social pursuits from 'watching soaps' to what may be regarded as more 'culturally rewarding' pastimes.

### *Experiences in higher education*

The concepts of 'field' 'cultural capital' and 'habitus' have been helpful in exploring students' interactions with other students, members of staff and the wider institution and understanding the way in which social structure 'interweaves with human activity' (see 3.2.2). As Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1998) suggests, individuals in a field have access to different levels of capital, which provide access to 'specific profits that are at stake in the field as well as by their objective relation to other positions' (Jenkins, 2002).

Students in the focus group appeared to possess levels and types of capital – social or cultural - within the field of higher education at Liverpool Hope. This was crystallised in how students sought to 'position' themselves in the focus group. Instead of positioning



themselves as successful, final-year undergraduates, the students positioned themselves as 'lucky survivors', people who were constantly on the verge of being 'found out' as unworthy of higher education. When asked how they felt to be final-year students, one response was:

**'Frightening! Because when I first started back I thought, 'Oh I just feel thick!' because all the work was being thrown at me. But I thought I can't be thick because I've got through my first two years, but I just felt overwhelmed by the work'.  
(F17: 21-23)**

A sense of 'unworthiness', of being discovered to be 'thick' also appears to have contributed to the students to positioning themselves as different from other students. Usually, such positioning was expressed in age-related terms; the sense that difference stemmed from being older, more mature, more organised and with gender and family-related identities:

**'Let's get this straight: the degree is a piece of cake; it's the organising of the family and the house is the main thing ...'  
(F18: 14-15)**

This extract may be interpreted as an attempt by student F18 to negotiate a particular position. By foregrounding herself as a mother and homemaker first, and a student second, the student attempts to lessen the significance of HE by referring dismissively to it as 'a piece of cake' for mature women with families and domestic priorities. From that point on, the students in the focus group adopted the position of mature women balancing families and domestic responsibilities, responsibilities which, in the final analysis, must be always be considered the priority (*'Family comes first'* – line 147). Some students were aware that once graduated, there would be an expectation for them to revert back to previous family or domestic positions:

**'The thing is I'm worried about when I leave and get a job, will I be expected to revert back to that role?' (F9: 135-136)**

**Reay (1998) for example, suggests a 'gendered habitus' informs and defines what both women and men consider to be appropriate and acceptable forms of behaviour. This student (F9), in describing her concerns about 'reverting' back to a previous gender-specific role, suggests that some form of gendered transformation has occurred but that this transformation is not fixed. Gendered habitus was also observed in the 'bad mother' discourse. Being a 'good student' implied becoming a 'bad mother'. Despite students' claims that they were seeking to provide positive role models for their children, the focus group revealed evidence of personal conflict and uncertainty:**

**'I think you make a lot of sacrifices. And I've got a six year old as well and I think I've been a pretty bad mother for the past few years for a six year old because she has missed out of doing a lot of things; I've got to go, what's important? I'm not saying the kids aren't – the kids will always be there – I won't get another chance at this. It's difficult because when she comes home from school and there's homework you feel guilty: oh God I should have been working, I should have done that with her. And at the weekend she'll say can we go somewhere and I'll go sorry I've got to work. So I do think she's been pushed to the back a bit'.  
(F19: 344-351)**

**This sense of fractured identities flows through the transcript and across different 'fields'. These 'fields' consist of people, places, cultures, practices and language conventions. Such fields do not overlap for many widening participation students. As few students in the group came from families in which relatives had experienced HE, students, in effect, had to 'translate' HE language into discourses acceptable according to the linguistic conventions of a field, such as working class families:**

**(F19) '... my mum's seventy-six and she says, 'So what are you going to be then?', because she thinks it makes you something. I say, 'Mum it's just a degree,' and she says, 'What does that mean?' I go, 'It doesn't mean nothing, dear,' because she**



doesn't understand that it's not part of her - it wasn't part of me either. I think it's a good thing that's made me want it for my kids now you know?

(F17) I've just started saying 'uni' – I've been saying 'college' for two years ... it sounds strange saying 'uni'.

(F9) Don't you find you say 'college' because you don't want to blow your own trumpet?

(F20) Depends on who I'm talking to which one I say!

(F9) My daughter goes mad and she says to me, 'No, you're at university, Mum'. And I go, 'I know that', but when you're with people who are not from that environment you want to play yourself down.

(PR) Because it sounds a bit ... showy?

(F20) Patronising, yes.

(FG IV: 68 – 82)

Sounding 'patronising' or 'blowing your own trumpet' is a risk taken by widening participation students when navigating the different 'fields' in which they operate. The above quotation displays a dual awareness of the cultural capital to be gained from higher education, but at the same time, a heightened awareness of the potential this has for alienating others. Clearly, there are compensations. Several students recounted stories of how newly acquired educational capital (again measured in the context of TV viewing) had impressed relatives. In some cases, there was a sense that their capacity to display and utilise cultural capital within applied settings had repositioned them within the contexts of family relationships. If on occasions students felt 'thick' in college, it was a different story at home:

(F9) When you're reading things now you understand them, whereas before you wouldn't know what they're about, or things on the news like Tony Blair makes a speech, I say 'cheek' and our Karl says 'did you understand what he said then?' and you don't realise but you have took stuff in.

(F17) Same in English, I get all the questions right on *The Weakest Link* now!

(M5) Something my wife said, when we watch films now I spoil them for her. I did this module in American Studies about dissecting films and you find yourself doing it – it's a pain really!

(F9) You find yourself dissecting your life. Analysing everything.

(F17) Yes, everything: *Eastenders* – he's the villain; he's the tragic hero ... (FG IV: 371-380)

The use of television, as a gauge against which students measure their learning, occurs several times in the transcript. On one level, it might be argued that in discussing their raised awareness of the construction of television programmes students' are demonstrating an awareness not only of different interpretational methods or levels, but of also of being aware of their own awareness - in Bourdieu's terms, 'objectifying objectivity' (Bourdieu, 1998, Jenkins, 2002, Webb et al., 2002). Television programmes provide a useful measuring tool for this new awareness; no longer can programmes always be watched passively, or information accepted on face value.

That the students had made it successfully into the final year of their degrees offered some consolation – they were, after all, successful learners - but when asked what motivated them to keep going three categories of response emerged. The first related to financial investment. The money invested in HE made non-completion all but unthinkable (lines 101-102). There was also a sense that by completing the degree an example would be set for dependents. The issue of being 'an example' appears on a number of occasions in other focus groups and interviews. To some extent, the idea of 'being an example' embodies government rhetoric in its focus on the power of the individual to transcend barriers:

'Mine's more an example for my children, you know showing them what you can do and you need to do it when they finish rather than later and anything you want you can achieve and the work you put in you do get something out of it, especially for their future you know, and my future as well but for theirs'. (F8: 109-112)

The third motivation was academic success. Most students in the focus group reflected, indeed embodied Bourdieu's 'exam hound' analogy (Bourdieu, 1988):



**'To do well in my degree; to get four A's; to do well this year; to get a 2:2' (143-144)**

**That other students might not subscribe to this was taken to be a sign of their immaturity and, paradoxically, because they were 'proper students', behaving as 'proper' students are expected to behave. In contrast, the students in the focus group displayed very limited contact with the college or any extracurricular activity not connected directly to academic achievement. The possible implications of this strategy on widening participation students' career opportunities will be discussed in Chapter 5.**

### ***Career aspirations and relationship with the Institution and careers service***

**One of the effects of the gender and domestic discourses the students used to position themselves was the complaint that the college was unresponsive to their needs as parents with children (181 – 195). Positioning themselves 'reflexively' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999) as mature locals ('scousers') also provided some of the students with feelings of alienation from the institutional habitus:**

**'What's let it down is administration – Registry has been disgraceful. For the first two years we were off site, so you didn't even come in here except for exams, and you felt an idiot asking someone where the library is. Well, where's that? And even now we went to an induction and we were told all the community stuff now is going to be in Everton - so here's all the old scousers here, let's put them in Everton'. (M5: 269 – 273)**

**Furthermore, despite claims that students are increasingly leaving the process of job search until after graduation (Universum, 2002b) the students in the focus group displayed a considerable degree of career awareness. Indeed, of the seven participants, only one (F19) was unsure of her career direction. Four (F8, F17, F18, F20) planned to become teachers via the Postgraduate Certificate in Education**

(PGCE). One (F9) was interested in working in a local voluntary centre, while another (M5) was already in full-time employment.

The transcript illustrates the extent that teaching frames career choices among widening participation students at Liverpool Hope. Even among those in the sample whose career aspirations are undecided, career planning is approached via a position of *not* wanting to be a teacher. An explanation for this could be the institutional habitus of Liverpool Hope, which traditionally has prioritised teacher training (Longden, 2003b). Students attending Hope, even on non-Education courses, consequently would be likely (according to a Bourdieuan analysis) to have greater levels of exposure to teaching and teacher training than students at other non-teacher training institutions. It was clear too that teaching is presented as a viable career option for widening participation students by tutors, particularly those working on access programmes:

'Doing the Access, they do tend to push for teaching' (F9, 419).

The impact of tutors' career advice can be considerable, particularly given the narrow 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) of the widening participation students:

'I don't want to go into teaching. When I first started I didn't know what to do. When I left college and went on to Access I did think about teaching but that was because one of my tutors said You'll be a good teacher, and then I thought going to university meant to be a teacher and to be honest I didn't know until I talked to you how much there was available' (F19: 396-400).

According to Harre and Langenhove (1999), being told by a tutor that '*you'll be a good teacher,*' can be seen as a form of 'interactive' positioning (being positioned by others) from which it can be difficult to re-construct alternative career aspirations – particularly if awareness of alternative career options is low. Financially, teacher training remains one of the few postgraduate courses for which mandatory bursaries are still available, offering 'golden hello's' for



those willing to teach shortage subjects (GTI, 2004). Furthermore, a career as a teacher may offer certain cultural and situational advantages. Teaching is 'a profession' which, once entered, offers 'more choice' - even for those not committed to a long-term teaching career (F17: 402). Teaching, of course, is also an occupation that can only be entered via a degree qualification. In this sense, teaching represents a realisation of the cultural capital, which the students have been striving to attain since entering higher education. Becoming a teacher may for some students be associated with the acquisition of cultural capital and cultural status along with the prospect of relative job security, a platform on which to build:

(F17) 'And not just teaching: you could go into anything. You could get your place on your PGCE but finish and then another opportunity comes and think I'll do that instead' (F17: 425-427).

Even for those not committed to a long-term teaching career, training to be a teacher after graduation represents a 'best-fit' solution to a short-term problem:

(F17) 'Primary school teacher: but I've got a feeling I won't stay there. I'll do it for a few years but I've got a feeling - I can't see me staying as a teacher. I want to do it, I've been in a school and I love it. Key Stage 2 is a junior school age and you're really engaging. I just can't see me staying there'. (F17: 389- 392)

For those less certain about future careers, the priority is 'to do something that you couldn't have done without your degree' (F17: 393-394). The meaning of this is undefined, beyond 'giving yourself more opportunities' (F17: 397-398). Indeed, it can be seen that the students rarely used the term, 'career' (even those expressing a preference for teaching). 'Jobs' or 'work' are the preferred terminology (see Table 4.3). As the facilitator of the group, my use of the word 'career' perhaps reveals more about my own assumptions and predispositions than theirs (the implications for this will be discussed in the next chapter).

Table 4.3. Frequency with which certain terms were used in the focus group

	Students	Facillitator	Total Use
'Career'	4	5	9
'Job'	6	1	7
'Work'	21	0	21
'Teaching'	9	0	9

As we shall see in the next chapter, the levels of awareness among participants of the careers service were limited. Students knew that the service was there but viewed it in restricted terms. This seemed to be consistent with a narrow 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). Whilst a few seemed content with this, Just 'knowing you were there' (425) was clearly not enough for all students, who wanted the careers service to be more direct:

'It would be good if someone could come round and tell us what options we should take: you know, give a lecture and give options to people' (F19: 460-461).

**Analysis of a tracer interview transcript**

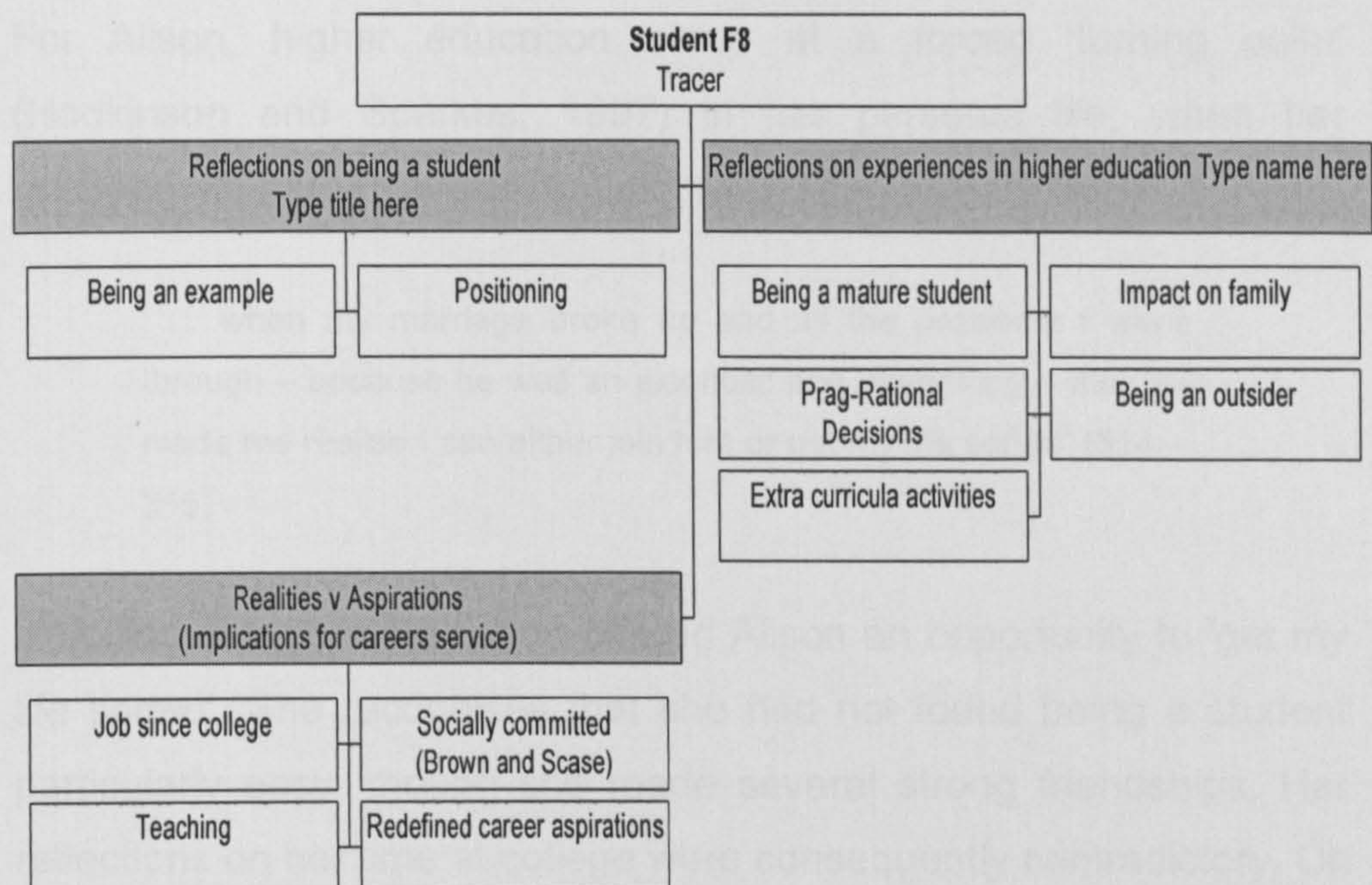
The tracer interview took place in early January 2004, approximately six months after the student (F8) had graduated. The tracer interview was held in the Career Development Centre in Liverpool Hope – the first time the student had returned to college since completing her degree. The interview was tape recorded and transcribed, with oral history conventions being followed in the construction of the transcript, which can be found complete and unabridged in *Appendix 7*.

Analysis of the transcript too was carried out using QSR NUD IST software. Categories were developed around the three research issues and from these, data was allocated to sub-categories or



'nodes'. A visual representation of the main categories and sub-categories derived from the analysis of the tracer interview is presented in Diagram 4.4. From this it can be seen that the primary foci of the interview was concerned with exploring with the student reflections on her experiences in higher education and transition from higher education to employment.

Diagram 4.4. Analysis of tracer interview



A semi-structured format was applied in the interview with 'Alison' (a pseudonym for F8) based on a questionnaire schedule (Appendix 3).

### **Alison: Biographical Context**

Alison entered Hope via an A level programme which run in her local community college in conjunction with Liverpool Hope's Reach Out programme. Alison graduated from Liverpool Hope with a second-class Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology & Information Technology in 2003. Alison lives in Liverpool, and has four children. Before the interview, Alison had been working in the evenings as a shelf-stacker in a supermarket – a job that she had throughout her three years as a



student. After graduation, Alison obtained temporary employment as an office administrator. This job ended shortly before Christmas 2003. In *Focus Group IV* Alison expressed an interest to train as a teacher, though I was aware that her application to the PGCE programme at Liverpool Hope had been unsuccessful. The tracer interview was the first time we had met since her graduation in July 2003.

### *Reflections on higher education*

For Alison, higher education came at a forced 'turning point' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) in her personal life, when her husband left her. This 'turning point' was seen in stark terms:

'... when my marriage broke up and all the problems I went through – because he was an alcoholic and everything – they all made me realise I can either join him or get my life sorted' (314 – 316)

Enrolling in higher education offered Alison an opportunity to 'get my life sorted'. She recognises that she had not found being a student particularly easy, though she made several strong friendships. Her reflections on her time at college were consequently contradictory. On one level there was sadness at having graduated, of no longer being a student. At the same time, she had strong her memories of how difficult and demanding the experience had been, and how insecure she had felt upon enrolling:

'God, it was a nightmare. It was a totally new experience. And it was one where I've seen myself grow in the three years – from starting work, the first few weeks I was leaving, I was crying, I couldn't cope with the work, people had better skills than me, you know? Seemed to be more knowledgeable than me ... thought I'd never ever get to where I am now.' (190 – 194)

This issue of feeling less knowledgeable than others permeates many of the transcripts with widening participation students. Additionally, a sense of being unworthy can remain up until a students' final year.



Looking back, Alison considered the experience worthwhile, using two metaphors, 'journey' and 'growth', to describe her experiences:

'It's just like a journey; you can see yourself grow and ... and it's nice. At the end you see the Graduation and it's just a whole, it's enlightening... a new experience. You grow up'  
(197-200)

While growth, at times, can be painful, a sense of newfound personal efficacy (Bandura, 1994) pervades the interview – despite Alison's experiences in the post-higher education job markets falling short of her expectations. For Alison the culmination of higher education was the graduation ceremony. This, perhaps more than any other aspect of her degree programme, typified the distance she had travelled (66–67). Graduation ceremonies for Bourdieu are redolent of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1988, Webb et al., 2002), the use of 'symbols' serving to reduce the academic barriers between students and staff.

When discussing the issue of enrolment, Alison's narrative has a tendency to become rhetorical. Her advice to her son, upon applying for sixth-form college was '*you don't know till you try*' (49). Her own transition is described as a '*lifelong circle*' (67). This leads some parts of the interview, when analysed, to appear clichéd, particularly when discussing the impact her education has had on her daughter:

'And my daughter, she's what – fifteen, and she's ready for the GCSE's and she's really focussed and got what she wants to do. She wants to go into accountancy or banking, university. Yeah, all those aims ...' (39 - 42)

I found this aspect of the tracer interview slightly worrying. I was concerned that Alison might feel the need to impress me, a member of staff, by saying things she thought I wanted her to say. Throughout the transcript Alison remains eager to stress how much being a student at Hope had meant to her, indeed how much the experience had changed her outlook on life (see for example, lines 76-78). In particular, in describing how higher education has changed her consumption of leisure time Alison draws on two discourses. First,

she uses an active 'leisure as enrichment' discourse (visiting a museum, projects on the Romans) perhaps to underline her new found acquisition of 'highbrow' cultural capital. Second, she uses the discourse of being a good (better?) mother – one who is now able and willing to help educate her children:

Yes, because my little boy, he's been going to the museum, you know, getting involved with the Romans – we look at the books – all things like that, the Internet – I'm not afraid now to go out and look for stuff on the Internet or take him to different places. Or you know, where he's asking me a question. One time I'd say, 'I'll tell you later'. I sit down now and explain things you know, more? Give them five minutes' (264 – 269).

This role as educator has placed an added emphasis on the role of parents as educators in government and educational discourse in recent years (Reay 1998). The 'good parent' is thus equated with one who is capable of serving an educative role. Higher education, in enabling her to acquire cultural capital in the form of knowledge and confidence, has in her eyes also made her a better mother.

### *Experiences in higher education*

Alison's account of her experiences in higher education exemplify Bourdieu's 'exam hound' approach (Brown and Scase, 1994) as against that of 'dilettante' (Bourdieu and Passeron (1964). 'Exam hounds' they found, concentrated on 'obsessive swotting' to achieve 'the examination pass that has become his (sic) sole goal' while dilettantes, through the application of an 'ideology of effortless achievement' set out to achieve the highest grades without giving the appearance of having invested any substantial effort (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964, Brown and Scase, 1994). This model seems to apply to students like Alison. That other students, particularly 'younger' 'dilettante' students evidently did not subscribe to her 'exam-hound' approach, and yet were still rewarded with higher



grades was for her a cause of rancour, even six months after graduation:

'... You could go in and hold a conversation and stand up and give a presentation or whatever, they thought you were really clever and when they saw your marks at the end – 'My God! How come you got so low, sort of thing. 'We got such and such!' And we used to say well you've got the books, you've got the time; we haven't'. You know? So it works both ways. But they seemed to like party and then in the last few weeks knuckle down. And I found quite a few got extensions a lot of the time and done it, whereas we never really asked for it – you were going to hand it in anyway on time, you know, you don't get no marks for that so maybe I've learned that part of it. So putting in for extensions and, you know? (231 – 240)

Alison's account further articulates the discourse of 'the good student' that is particularly important to widening participation students. 'The good student' contributes to seminars, prepares for group presentations, studies hard during holidays, hands assignments in on time. The problem, as Alison discovered, is that 'the good student' is not a discourse necessarily subscribed to by lecturers, few of whom make allowances for her additional responsibilities or reward her diligence. Assessment is still weighted heavily towards examinations, lending an unfair advantage, in her view, to younger students:

'... what I didn't like in certain aspects were we might have put 110 per cent in class effort wise – talks, opinions, you kept a class going and you got nothing for it, come the exams. You maybe flunked – a bit – because as I say with my workload and whatever that should be taken into account, you know?' (215-219)

There was a sense that younger students were more familiar with the rules in the 'field' or 'game'. For Alison, realising that all students were not necessarily equal 'players' within the higher education 'field' came as a shock which she was unhappy with:

'... to begin with I just went with the flow and after that I thought  
'No': this is my degree, nobody else's. Nobody else should  
benefit from that sort of thingyo'. (211-213)

Despite this, Alison's viewed her time in college in positive terms. Compared to her present situation, being at Hope offered a haven from the uncertainties, pressures and 'realities' of the external world:

'It's like a safety net in here, you know? You're working, and you're like surrounded, and you knew you could go to uni and do your work ... and you were fine, go home, whereas now it's not' (178 – 180).

### *Reflections on career aspirations: aspirations versus realities*

After graduation Alison found temporary work in an office (5 – 8). The job finished shortly before the interview, leaving her unemployed at the time of the interview. Experiences since leaving college appear to have been disjointed; the description of her as being '*back to square one*' and '*desperately looking for a job*' fits uneasily with the teaching aspirations she discussed in the focus group. Teaching for Alison is no longer a goal; what is more, she now claims it never was. Being rejected from the PGCE was, '*a relief*' (303).

The decision to train as a teacher appeared to be motivated by pragmatically rational decisions linked to the availability of finance,

'the opportunity to carry on studying without actually paying ... you're getting another twelve months of going in and learning something new' (339 – 341)

As teaching was the only 'graduate' career she had considered, Alison's 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) were extremely narrow. Consequently, the future is vague:

'My plans for the future? I honestly don't know. I don't really look that far ahead' (345-346).



Alison is a 'local' (Gouldner, 1957) in that she must remain in Merseyside to care for her children. Consequently, she considered herself to be looking for a job working with '*post-sixteen's or an agency like helping or supporting people*' (307).. The new jobs appear to be located primarily in Brown and Scase's (1994) '*socially committed*' career orientation. Indeed, when asked to prioritise cards displaying individual definitions of Brown and Scase's (1994) categories Alison quickly selected '*socially committed*' as being most related to her outlook:

'because you're showing people with different backgrounds- especially people from working class backgrounds who maybe need a little bit more support and help but you can do things with their lives, there is a future for them ...' (288-291).

Alison also appears to be repositioning herself since graduation away from a purely *socially committed* orientation towards that of a *conformist* – particularly when discussing issues around job and financial security:

'That's my main aim. I'd like to get in a job and I'd stick with them for twenty years. You know I'd give them twenty years of my time if it had a good working environment, offered me opportunity to better myself and financial rewards like pensions ... so I'd be quite happy' (134 – 137).

In this extract Alison reveals how her aspirations since graduation have become informed by *traditional bureaucratic* and *conformist* orientations. These aspirations, as Brown and Scase (1994, p.147) have argued, are likely to make Alison less compatible with evolving '*adaptive*' labour markets which are placing a greater emphasis on the acquisition of cultural and aesthetic skills (Warhurst and Nickson, 2001).

In conclusion, both transcripts are rich in data, but illustrate well how Bourdieu's concepts might be utilised to understand widening participation student experiences and perspectives.

# Chapter 5: 'Outcasts' or 'lucky survivors'?

## Advanced organiser

This chapter aims to provide a logical and sequential format for engaging with key issues to have emerged from the study. Section 5.2 offers four student profiles, each chosen to highlight issues related to Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientations model. Section 5.3 concludes with a reflection on some of the wider issues engaged by the study.

## Introduction

*'How can we give explanations without pinpointing individuals?'*<sup>9</sup>

The aim of this chapter is ambitious: to provide an insight into the wider social, cultural and economic contexts within which students operate. It will also attempt to illustrate the extent that students' career aspirations and orientations evolve over the course of their final year in HE and during the period in which they make the transition to work. The chapter consists of four student profiles, each based on data obtained from the research interventions. In adopting this approach, the aim is to engage with the underlying research concepts within the context of student biographies. As Bourdieu (1988) wrote:

*'... how can we offer readers the means of understanding – which means taking people as they are – except by providing the theoretical instruments that let us see these lives as necessary (original emphasis) through a systematic search for the causes and reasons they have for being as they are?'*  
(Bourdieu, 1988, p.1)

---

<sup>8</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1988) 'Homo Academicus', Polity Press, Cambridge.

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu, P. (1999) 'The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society'. Polity Press, Cambridge.



Each profile has been selected to provide a unique 'instance in action' (Cohen and Mannion, 1989) – a representation of the experiences, aspirations, insights and trajectory of an individual as they move from higher education to employment. Each profile also offers an opportunity for exploring the conceptual framework, both empirically and within the contextual setting of the student's life history. Third, I would argue that each case study offers an insight into the complex relationships, which exist in the HE 'field' between social structures such as social class, family backgrounds, institutional agendas, and the actions of 'agents'.

The profiles have been constructed with reference to Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientations model (see Chapter 3). The aim was to assess, as far as possible, the extent that these 'ideal types' would prove valid, or were possessed with a wider level of application, when applied with widening participation students. Thus, the four profiles represent individual 'orientations' – two 'conformist' and two 'non-conformist'. A wider discussion of relation between the findings and the conceptual framework will be presented in the following chapter.

## **Student Profiles**

The aim of this section is to attempt to understand, by applying a personal perspective, the lives, experiences and aspirations of four students. Each of the four participated in all aspects of the research (interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, tracer interviews). While each of the four agreed to let me use their statements as part of the thesis, this agreement was on the basis that, as far as possible, names of identifying places and individuals would be changed to prevent identification.

The profiles are based primarily on data from interview transcripts (although data from the questionnaires was also used on a supplementary basis). These were produced from tape recordings

made at the time of the interviews. As far as possible, each transcript represents an accurate account of each interview (in no places were words replaced with others, or the order of questioning altered).

### *Background information*

As a sample, the four profiles offer a reasonably accurate representation of the 28 students with whom I worked. All four had entered Liverpool Hope via widening participation initiatives. All lived in the local area. Indeed, three out of the five resided in the Liverpool sub-region. All four (three women, one man) were aged over 40. All had at least one dependant (one woman had recently become a grandparent). Three of the four had undertaken some form of paid employment while studying. The number of hours worked in such jobs varied. All graduated in July 2003.

### *'Career orientations' model*

One of the objectives influencing the development of the student profiles was to enable a more informed discussion to take place around the validity of Brown and Scase's (1994) 'career orientations' model. To this end, the four case studies were developed on the basis that each could be seen to represent to varying degrees, one (or several) of the orientations as posited by Brown and Scase (1994). The model was introduced to students on two separate occasions. First, as *Question 14* (see Appendix 2) in the questionnaire (administered in early 2002), and during the tracer interviews when students were presented with eight cards on which Brown and Scase's (1994) 'ideal type' categories were printed. Students were required to rank each card according to preference. We then discussed the categories in relation to student's choice; in some cases, cards were re-prioritised after these discussions. The outcome of this exercise was added to the student's personal research file and helped form the basis for following categorisation (see Table 5.1).



Table 5.1. Distribution of career orientations among student profiles

<i>Career Orientation Category</i>	<i>Student Identifier</i>
Traditional Bureaucratic	F12 'Susan'
Entrepreneur	F9 'Jill'
Ritualist	M6 'Peter'
Socially Committed	M16 'Alison'

Source: Brown and Scase (1994)

Brown and Scase (1994) developed six categories under the headings, *conformist* and *non-conformist*. The following profiles represent four of these categories – two *conformists*, and two *non-conformists*.

*Format of the student profiles*

While each student profile assumes a different format in order to reflect that individual's experiences, the overall presentation reflects an attempt to engage with the key research issues. Thus, each student profile explores reasons for enrolment, experiences and aspirations while in higher education, and the extent that the students' aspirations reflected their 'realities' in the job market. When appropriate, implications for the careers service are discussed. In terms of the 'pragmatics of writing' (Bourdieu, 1999, p.622), headings and sub-headings have been used to orient attention towards issues relevant to the research issues.

## **SUSAN**

**'Single parent, part-time student, full-time worker'**

### **Introduction**

Susan is divorced with two teenage sons. Living on the outskirts of Liverpool, she works as a civil servant in a large government agency. Susan enrolled on a Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Development shortly after she and her husband split, a time when she described her confidence as being low:

**'When I actually joined the course it was to prove to myself that I could actually do it because I didn't do a great deal when I was supposed to go and do it. That was my major incentive to be here, to prove to myself that I could do it'. (Focus Group 3, 206-209)**

Proving herself – in education, in the eyes of her family, in her work – seemed to be an aspect of Susan's habitus, and one that would come to influence her experiences in higher education. No other member of her family had experience of higher education; instead, most had left school to work in manual, unskilled jobs. For Susan, leaving school at sixteen therefore seemed a normal progression, particularly as she left school with few formal credentials. Like other widening participation students, Susan's life seemed to have been characterised by 'decisions' but few 'choices' (Ball et al., 2002). Acquiring a 'good job', a job with security, stability and incremental progression was her principal aspiration. This was provided by the Civil Service, in which she has worked ever since school.

As part of its staff development policy, the Civil Service offers funded support for staff to enrol in evening classes. Aware of having under-performed in formal education, Susan enrolled in a local night school, initially her aim was to study for A' levels, but, when it became available, she switched to an access programme:



'When my children were really small I went back to do an Access to Higher Education Certificate because I thought, well I really want to do this so I went through that route, and then got back into it, because I could do that part-time because I still worked full-time, and did that over a couple of years ...'  
(Interview, 46-51)

### *Reasons for enrolment*

The breakdown of her marriage was a point in her life when Susan appeared to experience a 'forced turning point' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). It was this turning point that precipitated her decision to enrol in higher education. Within four weeks she had joined the 'Professional Development' programme at Liverpool Hope – a four-year part-time widening participation degree programme aimed at adults displaying the 'potential' for higher education but not the formal qualifications. Susan was not the only widening participation student in the study to enrol in HE at a time of personal and family turmoil. Other students – all women – described making the decision amid similar domestic circumstances. Education seemed to provide not just a route to higher skills, and the promise of improved economic circumstances, it also appeared to represent a psychological haven, what West 1996, p.115) terms a 'capacity to adjust to uncertainty and changing demands without psychologically fragmenting' (West, 1996, p.115):

'That was the reason I wanted to be an undergraduate and acquire the degree, it was just to prove to myself that what I didn't pursue at eighteen I could still do in my thirties so that was my first impetus if you like'. (Interview: 18-28)

In each of Susan's interviews, (and focus group) reference was made to the perceived relationship between higher education and increased levels of self-confidence. As a term, 'confidence' may be used to describe a range of psychological states: *confidence* to speak in public; *confidence* to apply for a job thought previously out of one's

reach; *confidence* to plan a career strategy. In some ways Susan uses each of these definitions, but in particular seems to relate confidence to 'self-efficacy' – an inherent acceptance of one's own value and worth (Bandura, 1994):

'I have this ... I have always portrayed this, it's like a deep defence mechanism because I am quite sensitive (laughs) so that's just my – or was – my way of dealing with it' (Interview: 176-168)

In response to the turning point, Susan displays pragmatically rational decisions based on limited, narrow 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). For example, after completing the access course Susan received an offer to study English Literature at another local HE provider. She rejected this and chose Liverpool Hope because the college offered financial aid. As the course progressed she came to rely on this:

'I quite liked Hope – it wasn't always hunky dory. It was quite supportive because they gave me some financial support, which meant I could go into year three and without it possibly I wouldn't have been able to go into year three because I wasn't in a position to be able to afford the fees at that time. Which was a huge, huge support'. (Tracer, 153-163)

Enrolling in higher education presented Susan with several different fragmented 'identities' between which she had to mediate: "single parent, a full-time worker and a part-time student ...and doing them all simultaneously" (Tracer: 246).

### *Experiences in higher education*

Susan's engagement in the wider college environment was minimal, confined and restricted to the margins of higher education life. As a part-time, widening participation student, Susan's involvement with Liverpool Hope was so restricted that she was able to acquire only a limited sense of belonging to a wider institution. Like others in the



study, Susan was in every sense a 'wash 'n' go' student (Redmond, 2003), attending college for specific lectures before departing almost immediately to resume her life beyond the campus:

'On a personal level, I don't spend a lot of time in the college because I only come here to go to class, because it's too far away. So I don't see any of the advertisements. We're not notified of them. We don't get anything from the Students' Union or anything like that'. (Focus Group III, 185-188)

At times this pattern left her feeling under-valued and disconsolate. Few tutors, she believed, were prepared to make allowances for her personal circumstances, or the fact that she was studying on a part-time widening participation programme. This further emphasised her sense of isolation:

'I think the tutors' lack of understanding about what it is we're doing and what we're expecting to achieve at the end of it is a big drawback because I've yet to go into a subject for them to know why we're there, other than for that particular subject. They didn't know what our degree programme was, which is a bit disconcerting, you think, 'hang on a minute?' (Focus Group III: 369-374).

Contact with students from other subjects, was also minimal. Susan mixed with those from her own subject and (widening participation) background. This could lead to an insular outlook. Susan's perception of being an undergraduate was polarised between 'us' (her fellow widening participation students) and 'the younger ones' (a term used collectively to describe other undergraduates). Rarely were there any grey areas. Not that this impaired her motivation to succeed. If anything, it spurred her on:

'... people said to me what are you going to do at the end of it – but the objective was to finish it, that's the achievement. Not to go and have a plush job somewhere else, because I quite like what I'm doing, but it's assisted me on the way. (Focus Group III: 211-214)

In Susan's case, motivation to complete the course seemed to arise from a dual sense of 'having come this far,' and the close relationship established between the members of her group. This support was particularly effective in the face of critical incidents – incidents, which unless resolved, might result in being unable to carry on with the course (the fear of not being able to complete the course is a constant, ever present theme in Susan's narratives):

'Because you do hit a wall – I hit a wall in year three when I thought, 'why am I doing this?' Because my job had changed quite significantly in the direction I wanted to go so in some respects, I didn't need to do the degree but I thought, 'No I've come this far'. Then it was like a personal achievement because, I've started so I'll finish, so it was that kind of thing that people need to be minded of. Don't sign up to something that you don't think you'll be able to follow through'. (Tracer, 141-151)

Susan was also aware that as a student she was acquiring skills – both personal and vocational – that she could apply in different contexts. During her degree programme, Susan received several promotions at work. These she attributed to the extra confidence gained from being in higher education. It seemed that the act of studying for a degree, and indeed, the status acquired from participation in higher education, provided Susan with new forms of educational capital which, when displayed among her friends and family 'transubstantiated' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.328) into cultural capital. From this arose an enhanced and assertive self-confidence:

'Well, I found that being at work I've always been quite confident but in my domestic life I'm a lot more confident there than I would have been. I don't just go along with people. If someone's talking a load of trash, I go, 'well actually,' when before I was like a nodding dog and wouldn't have challenged them. My confidence at work and my confidence at home are completely different'. (Focus Group III: 278-283)



A newly found ability to distinguish when *'someone's talking a load of trash'* is revealing. Not only does this suggest a 'repositioning' in Susan's self awareness (Susan is aware that higher education has re-positioned her as being better informed than those with whom she would have once remained silent - 'a nodding dog') it also demonstrates how, for Susan, higher education is equated with a sense of 'distinction' – of being discerning, and cultivated. By acquiring 'the new language of academia' (Britton and Baxter, 2001, p.93) Susan's identity has been challenged and changed. The extent of this change is evident in her response to people to whom she might have once acquiesced.

### *Career aspirations*

Susan's employment gradually assumed greater importance during the time in which she was at Hope. Promoted on several occasions, Susan gradually became aware that the Civil Service offered a career structure, which as a graduate she could take advantage of. Leaving the Civil Service became unthinkable. Bureaucratic and hierarchical, the Civil Service also seemed to provide Susan with comfort and a sense of security. It was a 'good job', 'a job with prospects'.

'I have aspirations to move up at least another level, possibly two. Probably wouldn't want to go higher than that. Grade Seven. I'm now a Higher Executive Officer. In the scheme of things, it's like middle management – middle to upper management. Upper management is SEO; senior management is Grade Seven. So I'm aspiring to senior management'. (Tracer: 35-50)

In this, there is a strong sense that Susan's career orientations were *conformist* and *traditional bureaucratic* (Brown and Scase, 1994). Her perspective of work was conceptualised very much in terms of working for one organisation, an organisation that itself epitomised structure and tradition:

**'I'll never leave the civil service and I probably never will, because that's my comfort zone – my security blanket – the fact that I'm a civil servant and I have particular benefits because I'm a civil servant that I have become accustomed to. And I would be loath to give them up. So, even though I don't get paid an extortionate amount of money it has other benefits to me – and the flexible lifestyle is primary with that. Money's not ... I like to do a good job. I like to be compensated but doing a good job's more important'. (Tracer: 182-190)**

**In her tracer interview, however, Susan also talked about how since graduation she had become more aware of how work was changing, and how *flexible* orientations were assuming greater importance, even within bureaucratic organisations such as the Civil Service. Susan's flexibility had increased through exposure to different projects and project-groups. Given this, her 'horizons for action' remained narrow (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). As she argued, in Liverpool few employers could offer equal parity of rewards or job security. The degree had repositioned her more advantageously within her employment field, providing her with educational capital in the form of credentials, which as an employee, she had been able to benefit from. Being a graduate, she felt, provided her with more status in the eyes of her employers. It also further differentiated her from possible work competitors.**

**When we met for the tracer interview Susan was keen to stress how her degree had increased her 'confidence'. It had also served to reposition her within her family. No longer, did she define herself by her troubled domestic history. Instead, she was keen to stress how far she had travelled:**

**'But now I am that confident, and self -assured. So possibly to other people I haven't changed but I get regular feedback from my friends and my family over how well they think I have done and they're proud of me because I have gone through quite a turbulent few years, come out at the end and I'm reasonably successful. And so I think people ... they see me a bit as an inspiration ... 'if our Susan can do it, I can do it ... and she's**



done it with all that adversity in her way and she's still managed'. (Tracer: 53-73)

## *Conclusion*

In conclusion, Susan's profile raised several issues. First, Susan's experience of higher education, beyond her class group, had been limited. During her four years at college, the only extracurricular activity that Susan participated in was her degree ceremony. As such, contact with the careers service had been non-existent. Susan was not entirely clear if the service was available for mature students in full-time employment. Added to that the careers service closed at 5pm when Susan's lectures started at 6pm. Such factors contributed to making Susan – like other widening participation students – feel marginalized and on the periphery of the higher education:

'It's taken as a given for a day student because some of them are on-site and it's given. Its even things like the Student Union: we never once got invited to the Student Union. We saw the posters, so you never felt part of the social part of the college – I'm not saying you were excluded; you were just never included. I couldn't tell you where the union was to be honest. It wouldn't have entered our head to go into the Student Union bar it just wasn't in our heads to go in there because it wasn't for us'.  
(Tracer: 165-180)

The second issue related to confidence. Higher education, for Susan, provided an opportunity to develop and acquire new forms of cultural capital. Allied to the development of cultural capital was the development of a new habitus and the leaving behind of a former habitus. Academic credentials defined Susan's new habitus, creating a sense of 'distinction' and an 'imputation of superiority' (Britton and Baxter, 2001, p.93). Nowhere was this more in evidence than when she discussed how being a graduate had helped her re-negotiate her relationship with her line manager:

'It makes a difference with my boss because he's also a graduate. But he's a postgraduate as well. And actually he made the comment to me not so long ago. We were brought together as a new team and we just gelled and he reconciled it that we think on the same level – we have different skills and different ways of approaching things but he puts that down to we both think on the same level because we're both graduates. And he made that association. It's quite complimentary really – I don't tell people I'm a graduate; he tells people I'm a graduate. Infact I've sat in a meeting and he's introduced me as a graduate, which was quite embarrassing at the time! But it was: he thought it was important that people should know that I was a graduate. It's important, you know? (Tracer: 128 – 139).

## **JILL**

'I don't think I could ever go back to just being a mum and a wife'

### **Introduction**

Jill is married with children and grandchildren. She has lived much of her life in Liverpool although several years ago she and her husband moved briefly to New Zealand. Before enrolling at Liverpool Hope, she studied on a Reach Out access course at a local community college. Jill enrolled on a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology and Information Technology and graduated in 2003.

Jill grew up in Liverpool where she lived her family in a working-class district of the city. While she was still at school, her parents divorced. This event seems to have been a significant event in Jill's life. Her mother remarried to a man whom Jill characterises as being 'middle class'. Jill's experience of education was limited: she left school at fifteen without any academic qualifications. From this, she entered work and, shortly afterwards, got married. Within a year she had had her first child.

Jill's narrative became more complex and emotional when discussing her 'middle-classed' stepfather, a man, with whom she appears to



have had a complex relationship. Jill's anger over her family's indifference to her education appears to have had a bearing on her decision to enrol in higher education:

'Nothing I did – I'm not saying my parents weren't proud, because they were – but when I got my school report (which I've still got) there was no big deal made about it. But when my brothers got theirs it was, 'Oh wow, he's done this'. I can remember them making applications to schools. Now ... I was one of the cleverest of the four of us and that's proved itself. And I hear my mum saying now you could have done this when you were little and I'm thinking no I couldn't have done this at that age because you had a baby and had a breakdown and I was expected to leave school to look after you – that was my role. Now I couldn't say that to my mum because she would feel, well ... it would fall out. But in terms of my children I've given them opportunities that I don't remember my parents sitting down after school and saying have you got any homework?' (Interview 2: 83-94)

This bitterness became even more apparent when she reflects on how opportunities were missed while she was at school for developing her sporting talents. Again, this was attributed to the perceived indifference of her parents:

'I was excellent at sport. I remember running for the Liverpool City Championships when I was twelve and doing the 100 metre sprint in 11.14 seconds and that year it was the Olympics and their sprinter was ten point something and I remember thinking 'Wow!' – and had my parents focused on that, that could have been me. Had my parents focused on that ability I could have gone in a different direction. But through that I got a boyfriend and decided not to bother. It caused issues at school and I decided not to bother. My parents weren't bothered, so what's the point? And I actually did leave school at 15 with no qualifications whatsoever. (Interview 2: 96-107)

That her middle-class stepfather 'knew the system', and through this knowledge might have been able to provide access to enhanced opportunities seemed to exacerbate Jill's sense of having been let

down. As a symbol of the 'middle class', Jill's stepfather possessed educational and cultural capital, which Jill felt, been unavailable to her. That he seemed reluctant, or unwilling to apply this to enhance her education, remained a point of conflict in their relationship.

At our first meeting, (pilot focus group) Jill was critical of her stepfather because of his (apparent) indifference to her schooling. In a later meeting, (Interview 2) she contradicted this by recounting a story of how her stepfather had offered to pay her fees. Tensions from this relationship, mediating as it did between possibilities and constraints, seemed to inform aspects of Jill's self-identity. While becoming a graduate Jill could be said to have fulfilled her academic ambitions, negative experiences of her schooling (and early home life) remained in her background, to be exhibited in her habitus. As Reay found in her study of working class women (Reay, 1998b, p.63) the effects of habitus continue to work long after the 'objective conditions of its emergence had been dislodged' (Reay, 1998b, p.64).

As a sociology student, Jill was able to draw on sociological concepts when describing various events in her life. The use of these 'tools' provided Jill with a facility for repositioning herself within her own narrative. At times, this lent her reflections an intense, sometimes painful self-awareness, a sense that only now was she seeing things 'as they really were'. For example, when she described her family: 'I come from a mixed family: my mum was working-class; my dad was middle-class' (Interview 2: 22-25). It also made her acutely aware of how gender combined with class can create socially reproductive structures in which she and women like her operate and learn not to question. Studying Sociology may have been a catalyst for this:

'We had to do an assignment for Sociology about identity: How does Sociology shape your identity? And when I finished that I nearly cried because I did succeed and more with what was expected of me in my class status and now I think how cruel the high-ups are to make you like that because it's wrong, because if you've got the ability to do something ... I just think well I wasn't thick at school. It just wasn't focussed on me, education.'



**'Nobody else in my family's gone to university, or college or higher education or anything other than your A' levels, and now I feel like I'm getting it thrown back at me - 'who do you think you are?'- by my own people, because it's still seen as you shouldn't be doing that, you're a mum'. (Focus Group 2: 51-62)**

**Like other female widening participation students in the sample, Jill seemed at times to be influenced by the 'Good Mum' discourse. This discourse appeared in several interviews and focus groups. Being a 'good mum' has powerful social and cultural connotations. It could also bring students into conflict with the college, in which being a 'good student' was emphasised. Attempting at balancing the two while feeling guilty that neither was being fulfilled adequately was a feature of several female widening participation students' experiences.**

**Jill's 'turning point' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) came when her son brought a letter home from school in which short courses for adults were advertised. She enrolled; and, a year later embarked on the Reach Out at her local community college.**

### ***Reasons for enrolling***

**Becoming a student was for Jill a 'culture shock' – financially and personally. Losing her full-time wages had a profound impact on the family finances ('...until 'the word 'overdraft' just became part of our daily life'). Being a student could easily make Jill feel self-conscious, particularly when talking to family and friends. This was an aspect of her narrative that Jill did not seem able or willing to apply a sociological analysis to. Feeling like a 'fish out of water' when first entering higher education has been found to be a typical experience among widening participation students (Brown and Scase, 1994, Britton and Baxter, 2001). When mastered, the same culturally specific language and customs which threaten to alienate widening participation students in higher education can easily alienate friends and family if applied in the wrong social context. This is the dual risk**

facing widening participation students. As newcomers to the system their educational and cultural capital has been acquired laboriously and sequentially through the 'legitimate order established by the educational system' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.328). This, coupled with their inability to grasp that in education, 'true familiarity' is indicated as much by 'distance' and 'casualness' as academic credentials, places them at constant danger of being labelled second-rate - more so, paradoxically, the harder they work. However, on the other hand, by acquiring higher education's language and customs (something which they must do if they are to be successful) they in turn, risk alienating themselves from those outside of the sector. The chances of this happening increase if a student is moving daily between two different and parallel social worlds. In Jill's case, the fear of 'sounding like you're blowing your own trumpet' was so great that it was only when reaching her final year that she felt sufficiently confident to use the (culturally loaded) term, '*uni*' (university) as opposed to less elitist sounding, 'college':

'My daughter goes mad and she says to me, 'No, you're at university, Mum'. And I go: 'I know that!' But when you're with people who are not from that environment you want to play yourself down' (Focus Group 1: 113-120)

On another level, as a 'local' student, 'a scouser', Jill felt that she could be at times stereotyped or positioned as an 'Educating Rita' by 'cosmopolitan' tutors (Gouldner, 1957, Wakeford, 1993, Smith, 2003) who would comment on her accent:

'I remember a tutor saying 'you're still very grammatically correct when you speak in a 'scouse' accent' and I said yes I am and I'm keeping it, because when you've lived in another country that's your identity. I used to hate it but now I'm proud to be a Liverpudlian' (Tracer: 161 – 166).



As a working class widening participation student Jill found the attitude of 'younger' students a contrast. Their attempts at 'effortless achievement' and studiously 'dilettante' behaviour <sup>10</sup> (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994, Brown and Scase, 1994) were in stark contrast with the hard work and conscientious attitudes of older students. For Jill, like others in the sample, confidence derived from academic success. To achieve this required spending extra time studying and revising. This in turn, affected her home life. Jill found being at college led to tensions forming in her marriage. In the first two focus groups several women spoke of how their husbands had become hostile when faced with their wives' learning. The implication was that through higher education women were gaining access to different types of cultural capital, which in turn could threaten the previously taken for granted gender division of domestic labour and responsibilities (Britton and Baxter, 2001, p.91). Few husbands it seemed, found 'repositioning' easy to deal with:

'When people say how could I go to university I'm just a mum, I say well you do this everyday don't you? You take your child to school; you pay the bills. So we do possess skills. And I think that men don't like it. My Steve <sup>11</sup> could help me when I was doing the access, and my daughter the same, but when I jumped up that level I jumped above both of their heads - so now I try I not to do any of my work when we're in the house together. So, I'll busy myself around the house so that once he's out I get the work done. Then once it's done it's like a huge weight off your mind. (Focus Group 2: 479-488)

Jill had limited contact with non-widening participation backgrounds, whom she defined as 'the young ones'. Largely she accepted this almost as a fact of higher education life: younger students had fewer responsibilities, fewer pressures, and fewer problems. As an older student, she spoke of her life as 'an open folder' packed full of other

---

<sup>11</sup> Name has been changed.

priorities than socialising. This meant that Jill's contact with the extracurricular aspect of the college was extremely limited:

'As a mature student we didn't get involved in the Student Union or anything involved in Fresher's Week. For a young student that's all part of it – meet new people, get bladdered, make a fool of yourself. Mature students don't do that because if you've got an hour's lecture you go in, get it done, go home because you've got a family life' (Tracer: 189-202)

### *Career aspirations*

From the beginning of her final year, Jill aspired to working in the local voluntary sector helping young people acquire IT skills. In this, she saw her role as a 'social entrepreneur': setting up the project, devising business plans, organising and managing project capital and recruiting community-based volunteers. When asked to consider the Brown and Scase (1994) ideal types she was drawn to their definition of the 'entrepreneur' but within a social context – this she redefined as '*social enterprise*':

'I like *Entrepreneurs* because that's how I feel about myself – having a new idea and turning that vision into reality. Engaging other people to try things out and supporting them in their ideas. I think the new word is 'social enterprise' and that's definitely me. I like working with *dropouts* because that's just a name – by giving them guidance and support you probably find these people are really creative. I'm very flexible. Marx said having the ability to change can lead to success. I am *socially committed* – I have strong social values and I like helping others'. (Tracer: 249-256).

Jill's capacity to engage from a personal perspective with Brown and Scase's (1994) conceptual model - particularly by her capacity to re-develop it within the context of her own aspirations – was fascinating. When we met for the tracer interview Jill was partway to setting up her social enterprise venture – an Internet café for local youth



situated on Liverpool's *Penny Lane*. To promote the café Jill had recently been in correspondence with Yoko Ono to obtain the rights to the song '*Imagine*'. In many ways her work had ceased to be a traditional 'career' in the sense recognised by the careers service. She did not have an employer, nor had she competed for the post via an advertised vacancy. Jill was however acutely aware of how organisations are changing from bureaucratic to adaptive paradigms and the implications for local communities.

I was interested in exploring with Jill the extent to which her sense of positioning had changed because of higher education. While acknowledging that her 'horizons for action' had broadened, Jill had found that this had left her feeling dissatisfied with other aspects of her life:

'Sometimes I just wish I could go back to being a mum and a wife again. Total day off. But during the day I can't switch off, because I've always got something to do and I feel I've achieved when it's done. I don't think I could ever go back to just being a mum and a wife. I think I've got a mission in life now' (Tracer: 161 –166).

Brown and Scase (1994, p.60-61) argued that for working class students the experience of higher education entails having to come to terms with a 'psychological and social distancing from families and friends' while also leaving them ill at ease with the new worlds in which they find themselves in after graduation. This was apparent to some extent in Jill's case: since she graduated people in her community had started referring to her as 'the posh bird'. When I asked her why this might be happening, she replied:

'Because I always say 'please' and 'thank you'. And that's not part of their everyday vocabulary – they think that's quite funny.'  
(Tracer: 114)

Despite this, at times Jill's grasp on her achievements seemed less secure, less convincing. Frequently she spoke of her fears of

reverting to how things were before higher education, of a future spent working in low-level jobs, of being mistaken for 'just' a mum or a wife. To safeguard against this she sought proof of her newly acquired educational capital – in this case in the form of a framed photograph of her in academic gowns:

'At Graduation, I didn't have enough money to pay for the graduation picture ...I wasn't bothered, but Alison's mum and dad paid for hers, so she said, 'I'll lend you the money'. I said, 'No, it's all right; I'm not bothered'. But she said, 'Go on, you'll regret it later!' So I did. I queued up for the photographer. And I'll tell you what: it's having that photograph that really convinces people that I've got a degree. That photograph really hits them. You've got a degree?' I didn't realise how important it was to get that picture on your wall! (Tracer: 290 – 297)

Of course, repositioning could also, given the right social conditions be uplifting. Like Susan, Jill enjoyed reflecting on how far she had travelled - culturally and educationally - since her access course. Personally, she articulated feelings of being different, more discerning, more confident in expressing her opinions:

'When you're reading things now you understand them, whereas before you wouldn't know what they're about, or things on the news like Tony Blair makes a speech, I say, 'Cheek!' and our Steve says, 'Did you understand what he said then?' And you don't realise but you have took stuff in'. (Focus Group IV, 371-374)

Mediating between different worlds however meant developing different linguistic patterns: one consisting of 'restricted code' (Bernstein, 1965, p.42) for use with local teenagers, and the other based on 'elaborate code' used when negotiating with bank managers and funding agencies. As a sociologist, Jill could appreciate how the use of language codes within certain contexts could affect not only how people related to her but also the social and cultural structures within which they themselves operated.



## *Conclusion*

Jill's profile illustrates how for some widening participation students, changes in the present can act as conduits to the past (West, 1996). For Jill, reclaiming and redefining her past experiences – particularly in terms of her education and relationship with her stepfather - was an important pre-requisite in making a successful transition. Not all widening participation students however are able or willing to make such a transition; indeed for some, the combined influences of habitus, field and capital are so powerful that in practice no such transition takes place. In the third case study, an unwillingness to adapt to new contexts was perhaps the defining orientation.

## **PETER**

'I haven't got a career, I've got a job!'

### **Introduction**

Peter is married with two children. Leaving school in the mid 1970s with few qualifications Peter had few options but to enter the employment market. Since then, he has been employed in the local housing sector. Like others, Peter entered Liverpool Hope via the 'Reach Out' programme and enrolled on a degree in American Studies and Geography.

### *Reasons for enrolment*

Like many widening participation students in the study, Peter was the first member of his family to enter higher education. Peter could recall neither his parents nor his teachers ever mentioned the 'option' of university. Instead, his priorities were around securing a good job: a job offering security and a decent 'living' wage. The motivation to study as an adult, derived chiefly from personal and academic factors:

**'I did it for the subject really. I wanted to get a degree, end of subject. I wanted to do something that I was interested in. There was something based around a job that I did: community enterprise and all that sort of crap. But I thought I do that for a living, I don't want to do that for a degree. So I chose American Studies because I've always had an interest in it. And you had to combine it with another subject and the choices were Human Biology, IT, Sociology, Geography and some others. But I'd always liked Geography. And it was good. Obviously I liked the human stuff – but some of the physical stuff was good too. But I did it of a night – I got no time off at all and I did it over three employers'. (Tracer: 203-205)**

**Peter was dismissive of the thought that his motivation to enter higher education might have been related to vocational factors. Studying for a degree offered a chance to do something different, something for him. This was a theme that emerged frequently in Peter's narratives. Politically, he was critical of what he perceived to be educational instrumentalism, of colleges and universities promoting courses in terms of enhancing students' employability. By adopting this position Peter had an interest in maintaining a distance between his work and his academic study.**

**Peter's decision to enrol at Liverpool Hope reflected a conflux of 'pragmatically rational' considerations (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) and, in so doing, illustrated the extent that local factors had shaped his options (Gouldner, 1957):**

**'I don't want to move out of Liverpool. I'm not going to move house. If it wasn't Merseyside it would be Greater Manchester or West Lancs. (Tracer: 126-129)**



## *Experiences in higher education*

As a part-time, student Peter's lectures took place in a community centre close to his home. This aspect of the programme had been attractive to him when he first considered enrolling. However, as Peter became more familiar with higher education he became aware that within the 'field', community-based studying was allocated lower levels of cultural capital, possibly through being seen as synonymous with widening participation, than courses taught on the main campus. This led him gradually to reposition his views on community-based education. In his analysis, campus-based learning was more highly valued in higher education than that undertaken on a distance-learning basis:

'...it's fine to have that sort of thing for the first year but after that I think you need to be integrated; it's not a second-class degree you're doing. The degree is exactly the same as the full timers so let's be in the same place as the full timers ... 'The idea that people can study in their own community is fine in the first year but after that move them on and get them more into mainstream otherwise you're just keeping them out from where things are happening'. [Tracer: 162 - 168]

Peter's perception that studying in the community, as opposed to studying on the main campus, marginalized widening participation students led to feelings of discrimination. In particular, these feelings were directed at the college administration services, which he felt treated 'Reach Out' students as second-rate:

'[R]egistry has been disgraceful. For the first two years we were off site, so you didn't even come in here except for exams, and you felt an idiot asking someone where the library is – well where's that? And even now we went to an induction and we were told all the community stuff now is going to be in Everton<sup>12</sup>, so here's all the old scousers here, let's put them in Everton' (Focus Group IV: 269-273).

---

<sup>12</sup> Campus of Liverpool Hope located in North Liverpool.

Like Jill, Peter seeks to identify widening participation students as locals ('scousers') and mature. However, for him, this definition has another dimension – that of being 'exiled' beyond the boundaries of the main campus. Of the 28 students in the sample, Peter appeared to be the most politically aware. This awareness gave him a critical insight into the 'rules' which he perceived as governing the 'game' of higher education (Bourdieu, 1996). Peter, in this extract, seems to sense that as a 'local' the college treats him (and other locals) differently than others. Not only are they not told where key facilities are (note for example: 'feeling an idiot asking someone where the library is'), by being located beyond the boundaries of the main campus widening participation students are unable to influence the agenda of the college. Gradually, a perception of marginalisation came to shape, and define Peter's interview narratives. Asked if he felt different from other students, he replied:

'I think so, because, like, you're doing a degree over there aren't you whereas we're doing ours in college. Ours is better than yours.' (Tracer: 170 - 171)

This sense of exclusion was exacerbated by the shortage of extracurricular activities available to Reach Out students. Participating in the cultural aspects of higher education – clubs, societies, students' union events, etc. – can assume an important role in inducting students into the culture and field of higher education (Brown and Scase, 1994). By implication, those whose engagement in extracurricular activities is restricted may feel less accepted. This appeared to have been the case with Peter:

'No, didn't really get the opportunity, not at all. So if you'd said to me go and buy us a drink in the bar I wouldn't know where it was. I'd have known where the building was but I wouldn't know whether the bar faced north, south, east, or west. Maybe the idea of the bar is one example, but the Sports Centre –how do I join the Sports Centre? I'm a student here, how much is it? There's none of that which could really bring you in to the whole thing really. And I only live down the road, South Liverpool' (Tracer: 177-184).



Peter's engagement with the careers service was minimal. Largely this seemed to be because he was not made aware that such services existed (*'Not a sausage. No career stuff or job stuff'*). However, he also argued that because he was employed in a full-time job, even if relevant services were available to him he would have been unlikely to use them.

### *Career aspirations*

Peter's lack of identity with the wider, 'cultural' aspects of higher education were expressed when we met six months after he had graduated. Although still in the same job, his job title had changed. Academically, he felt the degree had changed the way he interpreted information. He felt he was now less likely to accept information on face value. Like most of those involved in the study, Peter claimed that being a graduate had given him extra confidence in his own abilities. This confidence had assisted him when dealing with different inter-personal situations at work. Being a graduate in a largely non-graduate work environment may have also served to re-position Peter within the organisation, although he was keen to play this down, claiming that what matters at work is 'experience' and 'being able to do the job'.

Discussing career orientations (Brown and Scase, 1994) with Peter raised a new dimension to the research. On both a conceptual and political level he rejected the idea of a 'career'. For him, a 'career' contained various class-based predispositions, which in turn positioned people in various social categories:

'I think it's a notion. A notion that people have that they've got a career. I haven't got a career; I've got a job. It's not a career. Don't want to conform to the idea of career – never have done'  
(Tracer: 30 – 33).

Peter perceived his own work not as a career, but as a job:

'A job so I can go out and get money so I can go on holidays and go out for nice meals and stuff, but it ain't a career, because if I had the money now I wouldn't be working!' (Tracer: 27 – 29).

This offered an interesting dimension to our discussion on Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientations. Peter was drawn to the 'non-careerist' elements within the description of the *ritualist* category:

'Definitely a non-careerist! It's not a career it's a job. I think the whole notion of career is bollocks, absolutely. And it's just a thing to keep people in their place really. Even though I've done well and got promoted, I think the idea of career is baloney'.  
(Tracer: 222-254)

Yet arguably, within this was an element of the '*drop out*' orientation. For Brown and Scase (1994), 'drop outs' are geared towards,

'cultivating alternative lifestyles ... neither committed to the established industrial order nor to its predominant values ... if they give any thought to employment and occupational order it is in terms of a *marginal* attachment. Essentially, they look for jobs that will give them sufficient income to 'get by' (1994, p.90).

Peter actually rejected the 'drop out' card, arguing that with a family and mortgage commitments, 'dropping out' was not an option. Yet the link between *ritualist* and *drop out* was particularly marked in Peter's case, suggesting a symbiotic relationship or, on another level, a reworking of the categories.

Peter's student profile is interesting on other levels. Unlike Susan and Jill he displayed a greater awareness that the 'rules' governing the field of higher education are loaded and that certain groups – in his case, mainstream students studying on full-time courses at the main campus – are at an advantage. He also appeared to recognise the class-orientated predispositions surrounding concepts such as 'career' and 'job'. There is a sense that throughout Peter's six years as a part-time student in higher education his habitus, by reflecting the different social positions in which it was constructed (James,



1998a) shaped his responses to education in the same way that it shaped his response to the concept of career. As previously argued however, Peter's position is inherently pragmatic for in challenging the validity of the concept of careers and educational capital, he is quite prepared to use it to his advantage if the need arises:

'I think that's a stereotypical thing of employers – just because someone's got a degree they're better than someone who hasn't. And that's a load of old tosh really. But if they want to believe it that's up to them isn't it. I'll go along with it!' (Tracer: 130 – 135)

## *Conclusion*

Peter's student profile offers an example of a widening participation student who became aware of his position in the 'field' of higher education. Within this field 'players' position themselves to compete for various forms of symbolic 'capital'. As a widening participation student, located beyond the main campus, Peter felt marginalized by the college and the sector. Not even an 'outcast on the inside', (Bourdieu, 1999, p.425) Peter's defence was to attempt to opt out of the 'game' entirely by rejecting classification. By doing this, he was, in effect, resisting my attempt to 'objectify' him. As a case in point, Peter demonstrated how the researcher can never fully control the multiple and complex effects of the interview relationship. As Bourdieu (1999, p.615) argued, by playing on those effects, 'consciously or otherwise', some respondents are able to impose their definition of the situation, tuning to their own advantage 'an exchange in which one of the stakes is the image they have of themselves, the image that they wish to give to both to others and to themselves'. Peter's robust, worldly cynicism combined with his bluff dismissal of the cultural capital attached by higher education and employers to degrees (*'that's a load of old tosh really. But if they want to believe it that's up to them'*) seemed to suggest an attempt to rise above the interview context by showing that he was capable of objectifying himself and adopting a reflexive stance towards his experiences and insights.

## **ALISON**

**'I can either join him, or get my life sorted'.**

### **Introduction**

The fourth student profile is of Alison. Alison's tracer interview was analysed in Chapter 4, and included here for several reasons. First, as a Reach Out student, Alison entered Liverpool Hope, like Susan, shortly after having experienced a domestic trauma. Unlike Susan, however, Alison did not have a 'traditional bureaucratic' career structure within which to organise her life, and unlike Jill she did not have a family unit behind her. Second, Alison, like several other widening participation students in the study, was committed to a career in teaching but this changed shortly after graduation. It seemed that the teaching profession might have held a greater significance beyond a career opportunity for Alison.

Alison is a single mother with four children. In 2003 she graduated from Liverpool Hope with a degree in Sociology and Information Technology. Like several others in the study, she enrolled via a 'Reach Out' programme in a local community college.

Alison's parents were supportive of her education, yet memories of her early life were overshadowed by a sense of regret, of having let her family down:

**'I was an only child so my mum never had much education so it was always brought on to me to do well: homework, whatever was needed – books, any support that way. But I just let it go. It was too much. But I always knew I could do it, but I let myself down'. (Interview 2: 108-118)**

When she was eighteen, Alison became pregnant. Soon afterwards, she was married. Pregnancy and marriage appear to have represented significant 'forced' turning points in her educational biography (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). In a number of ways, both



reduced her horizons for action. In our meetings, Alison would often return to this period of her life – a period when, as she said, she ‘let herself down’. Like Jill, negative or difficult events in Alison’s earlier life seemed to be interwoven within her habitus, continuing to influence and define her self-perception:

‘My cousin lives in Jersey and she’s a head banker, she’s really encouraged me. But other than that I think I was the let down.’  
(Focus Group II: 371-374)

Once married, Alison moved away from Liverpool to live in Scotland with her husband’s family – an experience that she was to find both geographically and culturally isolating:

‘It’s culture; my dad’s Scottish, my mother’s from Liverpool ....I’ve got family around my ex-husband’s side who live in Glasgow which is, I’d say compared to Liverpool, fifty years behind where we are and children are brought up again for education. Girls are just to get married - very, very old-fashioned views’. (Interview 2: 66-81)

While raising her children, Alison worked in shops and offices. Mostly, this was low skilled, service sector work. Feelings of not having lived up to her parents’ expectations remained. Alison claimed that while she was working, *‘I knew it was boring, no job satisfaction. My brain was dead’*.

The second significant ‘turning point’ came when Alison’s husband left. Her ‘horizon for action’ (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) seemed to have narrowed even further:

‘I was pregnant and I had a little boy and I had been doing little jobs in shops and I used to sit there on the till thinking there’s more to life than this, I’ve got a brain and I should use it, and it was just I was thinking I’ve got to get out of it’ (Int. 2: 156-188).

## ***Reasons for enrolment***

A health visitor suggested to Alison that she 'go back go school' by enrolling in adult education classes at a local community college. Taking this advice, she opted to enrol on a basic computing programme. This she followed with a pre-higher education, 'Reach Out' course at a local community college. Two years later, Alison enrolled for a degree programme at Liverpool Hope. Although she spoke of higher education as 'a general progression', Alison was aware of the significance of how far she had travelled:

**'It was something I should have done years ago, something my mother always wanted to do and achieve and as I say I went to college to do A levels and ended up pregnant so it was always there but I suppose it took all those other factors to make me go out and do it. So it was a change. I had to do something for my life – for my children's future. They didn't have a father there; I didn't want to live off state benefits and I didn't want them to live in the culture – especially the area they come from: it is a progression that they go on the dole and that's the way of life, meet someone, get married ...'(Interview 2: 156-188)**

Setting an example to her children was another motivation for Alison who, on a number of occasions, spoke of her worries over her children's futures. Living in a poor district of Liverpool, Alison was concerned about the social and cultural imitations of the community in which she lived. Succeeding in education was a way of 'showing them':

**'There's more to life than a lot of the places are offering, especially round this area, the community, the schools, they're all offering the same things for a working class area. They're not thinking about the children's aspirations, they're not giving them anything to look forward to; they're not giving them anything to strive for. So I thought this way it's showing them' (Int. 2: 373-382).**



Like other widening participation students, Alison 'chose' Liverpool Hope for pragmatic reasons. The college was geographically convenient from where she lived and had a local reputation for accommodating mature students. Alison's Reach Out course was also run in conjunction with Liverpool Hope. As such, enrolling was more of a 'decision' than a 'choice', in that no other alternative institution, at any stage, was considered (Ball et al., 2002):

'I never really looked into other choices, to other subjects. May be that was a problems on my part, that I just didn't think of other options.' (Focus Group II: 192 – 194).

### *Experiences in higher education*

For Alison, higher education represented a 'culture shock'. Lacking the appropriate forms of cultural capital, which might have enabled her to exhibit the 'effortless achievement' displayed by other students, Alison (as with Jill and Susan) invested her energies in becoming an 'exam hound' – working hard for academic success at the expense of participating in other aspects of institutional life (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.62). This approach seemed to have developed during the Reach Out programme and became a vital part of Alison's educational apprenticeship. Indeed, a similar attitude to study has been found among widening participation students in other studies (Marshall, 1997, Brine and Waller, 2004, Britton and Baxter, 1999, Hayes et al., 1997, Wakeford, 1993). As Brown and Scase (1994, p.62) discovered,

'It was through examination success, even if this did not amount to 'first class' grades, that working-class students felt they deserved to be at university on their own merits'.

Yet, for some students, examination success comes at a price. Life as an undergraduate for Alison was a hectic dash between home, lectures and a part-time job as a shelf stacker. Time spent socialising and participating in non-academic pursuits was rare. Instead, faced

with rising debts, Alison considered leaving on a number of occasions. What sustained her was the personal support from other (mainly widening participation) students.

'... we've got a good network of friends, so we're there to support one another. I'm not very good with time or organisation with everything that's going on in my life so I may be relying on Jill to tell me don't forget with this that or the other whereas I maybe able to help with other issues, there's a good network of friends' (Focus Group 2: 250-255).

### *Aspirations and orientations*

Alison's career aspiration during her final year in college was to train to be a teacher. Teaching had been suggested to her by 'significant others' – in her case, access tutors and friends (West, 1996). However, while discussing the origins of this idea I began to feel that her interest in teaching was more complex than she herself perhaps, acknowledged. On one level of course, many mature students aspire to be teachers. Indeed, among those involved in this study, teaching was by far the most common aspiration. Each year, more Liverpool Hope students enter the teaching profession than almost any other sector (LHUC, 2003). Numbers of women training to be teachers are particularly high (Sunday-Times, 2003). Teaching offers numerous, well-publicised benefits, including mandatory bursaries. Such benefits tend to be popular with mature students.

Yet, for Alison, teaching appeared to take on a wider significance. Prior to starting at college, her youngest son had experienced learning difficulties in school. To support him, she had paid for extra tuition. However, at the end of the year the school refused to allow him to move to the next level, despite her claims that he had attained the required standard. Alison met with several teachers to argue the boy's case, but without success:



**'... he was put in the bottom stream with boys who have been expelled ... who were bad behaviour, so those who wanted to learn couldn't. And the teachers told me what this group was for, they knew that the parents could afford to get them jobs, but the ones who did want to learn were left out. And I was willing to pay for education to support him, so all my money was poured down the drain because they had this perceived idea ...' (Interview 2: 120-136)**

**Alison had few illusions about what 'perceived ideas' might mean for her son's education. That she was unable to influence the school's decision – unlike other parents – was difficult for her to acknowledge. On another level, she appeared to recognise that as a single, working class mother, living in one of Liverpool's poorest neighbourhoods, she lacked the 'self-certainty' of middle-class parents, particularly when negotiating with educational professionals (Reay, 1998b, p.66). This reduced her ability to operate as a 'player' in the wider 'game'. Lacking both educational and cultural capital, Alison was likely to be disadvantaged from the start. Given this scenario, her decision to enrol in higher education acquired an added logic. Through higher education, Alison would in theory stand to acquire the educational and cultural capital required to negotiate more equitably with teachers. Furthermore, by instigating what Reay (1998b, p.63) has termed 'a disjuncture', a 'break with the past', Alison was making a deliberate and conscious effort to ensure that her child's experience at school was different from her own. Viewed in another way, Alison was trying to generate 'profits' from the acquisition of cultural and educational capital. Yet, as Hodkinson (Hodkinson, 1998, p.98) has argued, Alison's use of the capital available to her, and the availability of the capital itself were themselves both 'constrained and enabled' by her habitus and her individual 'horizon for action'. In this sense, the school, as a symbol of the educational 'field', became a marketplace in which the value of Alison's capital could be tested. This appears to be what she is indicating in the following extract. When visiting the school towards the end of her final year, Alison perceived a change in how the teachers related to her:**

**'When you go in and speak to the teachers (we're doing it in Sociology now) that was always middle class parents wanting to discuss their children's attainments and aspirations and now I'll go in and say, 'Right what we're doing? And ... they treat you differently. They treat you differently. It's never, 'Hold on and we'll try and make an appointment for you' - they'll always have time for you. I'll knock to see the Head and it's not, 'Have you got an appointment?' It's, 'Let me get him'. It's changed'. (Interview: 108-118)**

**Indeed, as her degree progressed and Alison's self confidence grew, she began to feel that cultural capital accrued from being a student gave her social parity with teachers:**

**'I've changed in a way, I've become more confident. When you go to schools and places you know, one time you thought teachers were ... professionals, but now because where I am you find you've caught up to them and in some ways you've surpassed them'. (Interview: 269-273)**

**Becoming a teacher could therefore be viewed as a habitus-related career decision, one formed on the basis of Alison's 'horizon for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), which was informed by teachers and the teaching profession. The decision was also pragmatically rational:**

**'I think it's because you get the opportunity to carry on studying without actually paying ... you're getting another twelve months of going in and learning something new'. (Interview: 360-363)**

**Six months after graduation I met Alison for the tracer. Her interview for a PGCE (at Liverpool Hope) had been unsuccessful. She was unperturbed by this, claiming that during the interview she had realised that teaching was not the job for her. She had been 'just going along with it' without having ever fully reflected on her options, suggesting perhaps, that Alison's interest in teaching was in part defined by a narrow horizon for action. Subsequently, she had worked in a series of temporary jobs in shops and offices. Alison's new career aspiration lay in working in the social and voluntary sector with adults**



who, like her, were engaged in returning to education. This preference was reflected in her response to Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientation model. Alison expressed a preference for the *socially committed* orientation. She justified this with reference to her own life trajectory:

'I think it's because you're showing people with different backgrounds – especially people from working class backgrounds who maybe need a little bit more support and help - you can do things with their lives, there is a future for them and you need to remember there are people like them ...' (Tracer: 288-292)

Alison displayed a pragmatic awareness that her earning potential was unlikely to equate to those advertised in graduate vacancy publications, such as those held in the careers service. She claimed that earning a high salary was less important than securing 'a job with a pension' (119).

In conclusion, Alison, as indeed did each of the four students profiled in this chapter, claimed that higher education had boosted her self-confidence. This confidence appeared to derive from the acquisition of cultural and educational capital, which in turn had led to the 'transformation of habitus' described by Reay (1998b). Asked to consider the extent to which she felt the college had prepared her for the labour market, Alison claimed that although, 'they were there for you,' she was too 'wrapped up with so much other stuff - home, work, studies,' (318-319) to take advantage of the services available to students. This is an important theme in this study. Widening participation students, by conforming almost exclusively to 'exam hound' and 'good student' discourses, have little time to participate in the 'cultural' aspects of higher education. In turn, for students like Alison, this disadvantages them when attempting to enter job markets that are becoming ever more adaptive. This issue and the implications it presents to students, institutions and careers services is explored in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

These four student profiles, each focused on a specific biographical narrative, offer an opportunity for exploring and engaging in the underpinning conceptual and theoretical framework. Using Bourdieu's (1988) terminology, the students can be seen as occupying dual positions of '*outcasts on the inside*' and '*lucky survivors*'. 'Outcasts', because, having been initially excluded from the system, their subsequent re-acquaintance with formal education appears to have been on a somewhat marginal, fragmented basis. 'Lucky survivors,' because, coming from social categories, which render participation in higher education 'improbable', their successes represent a 'symbolic remuneration' which, for Bourdieu, was comparable to 'a nominal rise in salary during a period of inflation' (Bourdieu, 1988, p.167). These issues will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.



# **Chapter 6: 'Wash 'n Go': Widening Participation Students' Experiences in Higher Education**

## **Introduction**

In Chapter 6, the discussion focuses on how findings from the study relate to the literature. Data from the four research methods (questionnaires, interviews, focus groups and tracer interviews) will be analysed. The discussion follows the three research issues: a) why do students from widening participation backgrounds enrol in higher education; b) how do widening participation students experience higher education once enrolled; c) what are the key implications of widening participation for the careers service? In adopting this approach, the aim will be to explore the contribution to knowledge posed by this study.

## **Motivations for enrolling**

Understanding what makes students from widening participation backgrounds enrol in higher education is a central issue in this study. Literature on student enrolment is largely indeterminate. Official publications have tended to focus on 'technocratic' agendas (Brown and Scase, 1994) or, what West (1996, p.206) term the 'hegemonic ideology of economic rationality'. Motivations, according to this view, derive from economic calculations. Students enrol in higher education to acquire specialised skills and knowledge, which, in turn, will position them more advantageously in job markets. Such views have been highly influential, and in turn have been fuelled by the on-going debate on the future of work itself (Rifkin, 1996, Arnold et al., 2004). Indeed, *economic calculation theory* may have become so ubiquitous that West (1995) argued it had become 'normalised' in student dialogues.

As part of this research, West's (1996) theory was tested with 67 final-year students at Liverpool Hope (see Table 6.1 below; also Appendix 4). The results would appear to support West's (1996) claim about the primacy of economic calculations, though with a caveat of important related motivations. Twenty-two cited career-related motivations, whilst a further 19 were motivated by the opportunity to improve potential earnings. Along side this, however, 24 students rated personal reasons as the primary reason for enrolment,

Table 6.1 Motivations for enrolling in higher education

Reason for enrolling N = 67	Number of times rated				
	1st	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
'I wanted to improve my earning potential'	19	8	15	5	4
'Because it will help me achieve my career goals'	22	10	6	7	3
'It was for job-related reasons'	9	10	14	7	3
'Because it will help me in the job I already do'	2	6	5	5	8
'It was for personal reasons'	24	15	2	5	4
'Because it was expected of me by friends or family, teachers, etc.'	3	10	4	4	6
'It was something that I always intended to do'	18	10	6	7	4
'There were few other options'	3	6	4	6	6
'It was what most of my friends were doing'	4	1	6	3	10
'Wasn't really something I gave much thought to'	1	0	3	5	8
'It was to postpone having to go to work'	2	2	5	1	11
'To escape a dead end job'	3	1	6	2	11
'For other reasons'	2	1	7	3	11
'My employer offered to support me (financially or with time off work)'	4	2	0	1	12



A slightly more emphatic picture emerges, however, when the results are clustered. In Table 6.2 the 14 factors are regrouped under the headings, '*personal reasons*', '*work-related reasons*' and '*other reasons*'

Table 6.2 Motivations for enrolment by Cluster

Reason for enrolling N = 67	Number of times rated				
	1st	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
<u>Cluster 1: Personal Reasons</u>					
'It was for personal reasons'	24	15	2	5	4
'It was something that I always intended to do'	18	10	6	7	4
'Because it was expected of me by friends or family, teachers, etc.'	3	10	4	4	6
'There were few other options'	3	6	4	6	6
'It was what most of my friends were doing'	4	1	6	3	10
Sub totals:	52	42	22	25	30
<u>Cluster 2: Work Related Reasons</u>					
'I wanted to improve my earning potential'	19	8	15	5	4
'Because it will help me achieve my career goals'	22	10	6	7	3
'It was for job-related reasons'	9	10	14	7	3
'Because it will help me in the job I already do'	2	6	5	5	8
'It was to postpone having to go to work'	2	2	5	1	11
'My employer offered to support me (financially or with time off work)'	4	2	0	1	12
'To escape a dead end job'	3	1	6	2	11
Sub totals:	61	64	51	28	52
<u>Cluster 3: Other Reasons</u>					
'Wasn't really something I gave much thought to'	1	0	3	5	8
'For other reasons'	2	1	7	3	11
Sub totals:	3	1	10	8	19

The reconfiguration emphasises that work-related reasons as the students' primary motivators, though students who selected, '*I wanted to improve my earning potential*' could do so for both work-related and personal reasons – as evidenced by the following response:

'I wanted to improve my earning potential – so that I could provide a comfortable lifestyle for my son, and I needed to prove to myself that I was capable of completing a degree'. (Questionnaire No. 7)

Perhaps not unexpectedly, the motivations for studying at HE level were complex and compound.

### **The relevance of 'turning points'**

Turning point theory (see Chapter 3) has been found to have a broad applicability in this study, particularly in relation to understanding patterns of student enrolment. Examples of each of Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) turning points were identified ('forced', 'structural', 'self-initiated'), but with contrasting levels of frequency. Few students in the sample appeared to have enrolled in response to structural turning points. When structural turning points were observed, it was in the context of two ex-servicemen who enrolled on access courses after reaching the end of fixed-term 'tours' of duty:

'They [Royal Navy] give you so much money as a resettlement if you've done a certain amount of time ... They gave me £2,000 to go and do a course of my choice ... Once you've said 'I'm leaving', that's it. You've got to sort everything out yourself. Go and plan your own future. So I was just thinking, 'What am I going to do?' I just had no idea. I just thought, 'I've been in the services. I've had that sort of life. I don't want to go into the fire service'. So I had to have a look at my options. And it was [to] a friend of mine, and I said, 'I'd love to go to university and be a teacher'. And he said, 'Well, why can't you?' And I said, 'I'm not bright enough', and he said, 'Go and do it!' ('Danny', Interview 1: 87-98)



Danny's experience suggests an interaction of multiple issues – financial capital ('they gave me £2,000'), social and relational capital (the impact of his friend's encouragement) and the structural turning point of leaving the Navy. Because structural turning points were constructed around fixed points in time, it was largely possible for students to anticipate them. Anticipation enabled a certain level of preparation. This proved to be a considerable advantage when the turning point in question had significant lifestyle implications. In some cases, employers sought to ease the transition by providing extra support in terms of training allowances and study grants. Similar levels of support were rarely available, however, with 'forced' turning points. The research identified students who enrolled via *forced* turning points. In several cases, these were initiated by job redundancies or health problems:

'Got diagnosed with a bad eye condition. So, obviously that mucked up my career [...] my eyesight deteriorated [...] at twenty-seven [...] deteriorated to virtually nothing. So [...] sit down and re-think the life. In the engineering company I was dealing with million pound figures, so obviously I wasn't going to be able to continue that. So I had to leave work' ('Lenny', M7, Interview 1, 27- 32).

'Forced' turning points were characterised by sudden, biographical discontinuity leading to high levels of individualised 'risk' (Beck, 1994). Surviving them, and going on to construct new identities or coherent biographical narratives, could equip students with confidence and 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1994):

'All of a sudden the work dried up ... out of eighteen people they made eleven redundant. I was the first to leave, and the day that I went to the Job Centre I said, 'I'll be back as soon as I can.' And when I got back to the factory, at about three o'clock, they couldn't believe I was going to do a degree. Leave in the morning and come back and do a degree. And go into teaching!' (Andy, M16, Interview 2: 233 – 244).

The above quotation from Andy raises other issues. Though being made redundant would seem to represent a forced turning point, it seemed to me that there must have been a prior personal positioning which led him to view higher education as a possible alternative and, furthermore, a career as a teacher as a realistic, attainable career option. For Andy, it seemed likely that this prior positioning was linked to his wife, who he later described as an experienced teacher. Andy's perspective can therefore be interpreted as a surface reaction, located upon prior experiences and predilections.

But forced turning points could also lead to negative outcomes, with an equally negative impact on a student's self-confidence. 'Lucy' became ill during her second year and had to transfer from the (vocational) Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) to a (non-vocational) Bachelor of Arts degree. Not only did this turning point suggest potentially far-reaching career implications, it also impacted on the student's sense of value and identity:

'It's as if you don't exist. That's what I found. You don't have ... if you're off the B.Ed. course you're just that person in the corner and everyone looks down at you ...'  
(*'Lucy'* F14: Tracer: 186-190)

Examples of forced turning points were, however, rare. The majority of students depicted enrolment in terms of what Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) classified as *self-initiated* turning points. These, they argued, occurred when,

'The person concerned is instrumental in precipitating a transformation, in response to a range of factors in his/her personal life in the field'.

Self-initiated turning points assume high levels of individual agency, which, in some cases, would seem questionable. The study found self-initiated turning points to be frequently inseparable from the biographical routines, which both preceded and followed them.



Although Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) acknowledged this point, I was concerned that turning points could be viewed as 'epiphanies' – unpredictable and isolated manifestations, rather than as manifestations of prior events and experiences. As the fieldwork progressed, it became possible to view self-initiated turning points as responses to events and crises in families, jobs and relationships. What could seem to be disparate events from childhood and later life were linked together in students' narratives, to be woven into stories containing new meanings and new interpretations. Even major life events, when re-told from the 'position' of higher education, could assume a new poignancy. The perception of having failed in school was frequently found to underpin, years later, the decision to enrol in higher education. The extract below captures a student engaged in re-conceptualising an apparently self-initiated 'turning point' within a wider educational and family-related context:

'I was quite bright when I was at school but I had an argument with a teacher, of all people. Six months later, I passed all the exams for the police cadets. The thing that failed me was my accent and the area that I lived in – and that was told me at the time – because I'm from Scotland Road<sup>13</sup> originally, and my accent was too strong. And I wasn't from a nice neighbourhood. So I became a mum and did part-time jobs. It was only when I had my son ... that I thought, 'I can't go on like this'. So I trained to become a nursery nurse and through that I come to Hope to try to better myself. But I regret missing all that time and not doing it a bit earlier' ('Aisha', Focus Group 1: 311-318).

While the above quotation from Aisha appears to represent a self-initiated turning point, there is a possibility that she might be condensing realities and romanticising the processes as well as providing a possible post-hoc rationalisation for her failure to enter the police force. It is not clear, for example, why her local accent was a problem, or how this had been communicated to her. Perhaps her account also suggests an element of *incrementalism* – of not having

---

<sup>13</sup> Road leading from Bootle to Liverpool, renowned locally for its socio-economic deprivation and troubled history.

the confidence or financial ability to enrol in higher education from school – hence the nursery nurse training.

As individuals live through 'turning points', their habitus undergoes a transformation (Reay, 1998b, p.63). Yet, as Reay (1998) acknowledged, the analysis of habitus is complex. Not only must it take into consideration the diversity which exists within social groups, it must also seek to highlight the 'crucial importance of the context in which actions take place' (1998b, p.59).

### **Habitus and student views on higher education**

Within this study, the concept of habitus provided an opportunity to explore the extent that social structures were embodied within attitudes to higher education and careers. Habitus was evident in students' attitudes to education. The image of higher education – particularly as encapsulated in the word 'university' – was a theme discussed in focus groups and interviews. 'University' for widening participation students, was a culturally loaded term, symbolising privilege, elitism and wealth. 'University' was 'terrifying' and 'for people with loads of money'. Even after three years in higher education, widening participation students were reluctant to use the term in context with themselves (the preferred term was 'college'). This was particularly the case when socialising with non-graduate peers. To counteract the risk of being seen to 'blow your own trumpet', students developed strategies for 'playing yourself down'. These strategies came into play when interacting with people who were 'not from that environment' ('Jill' Focus Group IV, 71-75). Substituting 'college' for 'university' was one way of ensuring this. In this, it could be argued that widening participation students, through their habitus, continued to 'embody' their own educational exclusion.

Overcoming these dispositions, transforming a negative educational habitus into a positive one, was perhaps the key challenge facing the



students. Asked to describe her pre-enrolment perception of higher education, the following response was typical:

'Terrifying. I thought it was for like, well I did, I just thought it was for people with loads of money who went on to do high powered jobs. Now, since I have been here and talking to people, I've found it's really just a starting block. It's after you graduate and specialise in something that it will be called for – in academic terms – but for me personally, this is a big achievement' ('Jill' F9, Focus Group 1, 18 –22)

The 'realisation' that higher education was *'not just for people with loads of money'*, and *'a starting block,'* not an end in itself, may be part of a longer-term habitus transformation, however tentative. However, because habitus is essentially non-representative, and therefore not present in the consciousness, what is observed is likely to be a newly acquired *belief* which itself is part of habitus. Habitus remains ever present: internalised in the disposition to act, think and feel. Indeed, in this study habitus emerges in students' accounts in the form of the tension between past lives and 'aspired for' futures.

Gendered habitus – the presentation of a view of the world in which men and women assume responsibility for carrying out certain roles - was particularly evident in women's accounts. There was a tendency among the group to identify themselves primarily in terms of marital or maternal status. Against this, being a student came second. In several of the focus groups, gender-related assumptions and predispositions emerged, particularly when discussing the domestic roles of men and women. The following exchange for example, took place in Focus Group IV:

Helen<sup>14</sup>: 'I feel guilty if I'm sitting reading a book doing nothing else'  
Hayley<sup>15</sup>: 'See, men don't feel that. Or do you?'  
Peter<sup>16</sup>: I do.

---

<sup>14</sup> F17

<sup>15</sup> F18

<sup>16</sup> M5

- Hayley: I'd argue that.
- Peter: It's different though, because you've got different expectations.
- Hayley: Men can cut off from children; women don't.
- Jill<sup>17</sup>: No, I'd have to disagree. I couldn't be here today without the support of my husband.
- Hayley: No, I'm not saying that. My husband's good like that. What I'm saying is, they don't think of every little detail like a woman does, I would say. If the kids forgot the lunchbox he wouldn't lose no sleep, whereas I'd be running to the school.
- Jill: 'But so what? They do it differently, don't they? The thing I'm worried about when I leave and get a job is will I be expected to revert back to that role'? (Focus Group IV: 123 – 136)

This exchange raises several issues related to gendered habitus. Hayley articulates domestic work as a female responsibility. According to her, men are less involved, able to 'cut off'. Jill and Peter challenge this (although Peter accepts that men and women have 'different expectations'). Jill's final comment, in betraying her fears of 'reverting back to that role' suggests how fragile and tentative her new graduate identity may be. Furthermore, gendered habitus could also lead to feelings of guilt. Being a student meant less time for families. This could invoke criticism from other women (particularly relatives) who perceived higher education as an indulgence:

'My mum, my family and them think that when your children are at school you should be looking after them at home. Better yourself when they've left ...' ('Aisha', F3, Focus Group 1: 267-269).

It seems that women widening participation students, in trying to effect a habitus transformation, are faced with attempting to construct coherent and new identities from roles, which, within their own habitus, are self-contradictory. A sense of contradiction is contained in the following extract:

'It's just the pressures of life: family, children, day to day living, financial. You feel guilty because one of mine's pretty bright.

---

<sup>17</sup> F9



**You've got to help them do their work and leave yours. At the end of the day, their future to me being a mother is more important than what my future will be, although I'm doing this to give them a better future. At the end of the day, their education comes before mine'. (Alison, F8, Focus Group I: 231-236)**

**For Bourdieu (2001), gendered habitus could lead to a 'paradoxical submission' through which 'the most intolerable conditions of existence can so often be perceived as acceptable, and even natural' (2001, p.1). In Bourdieu's analysis, such domination was brought about through a form of 'symbolic violence'. This he defined as:**

**'a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely, misrecognition), recognition, or even feeling' (Bourdieu, 2001, p.1-2).**

**Both men and women seemed to accept their social identities, rarely questioning their assumptions. Writing from an external feminist perspective, Lovell (2002, p.12) argued that such acceptance arises out of the habitus, which 'names the characteristic dispositions of the social subject'. For her, habitus is indicated in the bearing of women's bodies<sup>18</sup> and deeply 'ingrained' in habits of behaviour, feeling and thought. Through habitus, women's social identities are neither imposed nor chosen. Instead, they are acquired as a result of 'the experiment of living' (Wallace, 2003, p.4).**

## **Tensions at home**

**As similar studies have suggested (Britton and Baxter, 1999, Britton and Baxter, 2001, Brine and Waller, 2004, West, 1996), enrolment in higher education can lead to tensions in domestic and personal relationships. As mostly first generation entrants, few students had 'confidants' at home with whom they could share experiences. Friendships with other students – fellow 'lucky survivors' - could therefore become close, in some cases, replacing those established**

pre-enrolment. Rarely did higher education and students' home lives merge. This led to a dilemma: Survival in college was to a large extent dependent on mastering a new language and its inherent customs, even though students were unlikely to ever exude the 'effortless achievement' displayed by others (Brown and Scase, 1994, p.57). Yet, in the act of acquiring this language, they faced the prospect of psychological and social isolation within the communities in which they still lived. Even after three years, the feeling of being an 'outcast on the inside' (Bourdieu, 1999) was hard to dispel:

'You don't feel you can approach anyone ... because you're older you don't feel you can go to personal tutors and say, 'I'm really having bad problems at home'. You feel like you're making excuses and that's why your work's in late' ('Samantha': Focus Group II: 73-76).

Such dilemmas, as Britton and Baxter (2001) found, could be particularly acute for women, who still tended to bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities (Brine and Waller, 2004). At times, some women appeared to exhibit dual identities: one for college, one for home:

'There's a lot of tension, a lot of conflict. And sometimes you think, is it worth it? And then you come here and you get engrossed in the atmosphere, and you're learning so much that your home problems disappear. But then when you go home you're confronted with them, and you feel so selfish'. ('Samantha': Focus Group II: 67-70)

Students involved in relationships prior to enrolling could find higher education leading to different sorts of dilemmas. Moreover, while none of those involved in the study lived on campus, reports emerged of numerous marriages breaking down. Not only did loss of earnings subject relationships to added financial pressures, the acquisition of educational capital in the form of new knowledge and skills could also threaten the stability of a relationship:

---

<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu refers to this as 'hexis' (2001)



'Mine started from when I went on my access course with my partner. I think he just thought it was 'a phase she was going through' [...] He was supporting me at the time, then I think it was a bit of jealousy. It just went from worse and worse [...] We're on speaking terms now, and we've built up a relationship, but there was a point (when) it was over. That was it. He was jealous and when we sat down, cards on table. He said, 'When you get your degree, you're going to leave and go off with some suit – lecturer or someone'. ('Samantha'. Focus Group II: 160-176)

While both male and female students appeared to accept a certain level of family conflict as a price worth paying, it is interesting to note that fewer students reported experiencing similar levels of tension while enrolled on access programmes. Higher education, through its association with cultural, social and economic transformation, evidently raised the stakes in many relationships, particularly when the student was a woman:

'I think men don't like it. My 'Steve' could help me when I was doing the access, and my daughter the same. But when I jumped up that level, I jumped above both of their heads, so now I try not to do any of my work when we're in the house together. I'll busy myself around the house so that once he's out I get the work done. Then, once it's done, it's like a huge weight off your mind'. ('Jill' Focus Group I: 378-382).

### **Pragmatic rational decision-making**

Students in the study displayed decision-making strategies consistent with those termed 'pragmatic rational' by Hodgkinson and Sparkes (1997). Such decisions tend to be opportunistic and based on partial information. As Ball et al (Ball et al., 2002) found, enrolling in HE was, for widening participation students, a 'decision' not a 'choice'. In other words, instead of exercising 'choice' by 'choosing' between competing institutions, courses, modes of study etc., the main 'decision' exercised by students upon completing access studies,

appeared to have been whether or not to enrol. Once that decision had been taken, few students seemed to have been aware, at the time, of the full range of 'choices' that had been available:

'I chose it (Liverpool Hope) because it was convenient from where I live and it accommodates mature students ... I never really looked into other choices, to other subjects. Maybe that was a problem on my part that I just didn't think of other options'. ('Alison, Focus Group I: 140 – 143).

Decisions to enrol were often informed by 'significant others' – access tutors, careers advisers and peers. What might appear to students as 'happenstance' (Krumboltz et al., 1999), of being in the right place at the right time, could also be interpreted as illustrating the extent to which widening participation students' decisions were informed, and limited, by local opportunity structures as well as chance events:

'I went to Norris Green Library and speak [sic] to the careers department and the lady there was actually doing a Reach Out<sup>19</sup> course and she ... said if I applied to Hope I could do a degree and do it in subjects I was interested in, and hopefully go on to teaching or whatever' ('Aisha', F3, Focus Group I: 155-159).

For others, enrolling at the college represented a continuation from access studies. This included the decision of which academic subject to pursue at degree level. Students tended to opt for subjects in which they had performed well at access level. Few discussed exploring other options. To some extent, access tutors may have indirectly contributed to this. Several students spoke of how younger students, e.g. sixth-formers studying on A' level programmes, had been invited to tour several universities before submitting UCAS<sup>20</sup> applications. Widening participation students rarely had access to such opportunities:

'I honestly don't know what was available to me. Nobody came up to me and said ... I was just dealing with other sixth formers

---

<sup>19</sup> Access programme affiliated to Liverpool Hope.

<sup>20</sup> UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service



and they seemed to go on different days out and see different universities and see careers, whereas I didn't. I just went on and chose a topic I was familiar with and would maybe find alright if I carried on with it at a different level'. ('Alison', Focus Group 1: 151-154).

This pattern may partially explain why widening participation students continue to congregate disproportionately in arts and social science subjects – a distribution, which as Table 6.3 suggests, is consistent with national trends. Students from access (and similar widening participation qualifications) predominate in subjects allied to medicine (nursing and health-related courses) and the social sciences. The implications of this pattern for students' career opportunities will be explained in the following sections.

Table 6.3.: Distribution of access students by subject and qualifications (2002-03)

Subject Group	Access	Other WP routes	Not Known	Total	Percentage with Access Qualification
Medicine & dentistry	5	180	55	235	1.6
Subjects allied to medicine	6,470	40,175	8,070	54,720	13.9
Social, economic & political studies	465	2,770	615	3,845	14.3

Source: Youell (2003).

**Conclusion: The ‘Wash ‘n’ Go’ Students**

Also consistent with similar studies on widening participation, was the finding that widening participation students experienced higher education as a largely marginalizing and fragmentary experience (West, 1996, Britton and Baxter, 2001, Brine and Waller, 2004, Ball et al., 2002, West, 1995). Among the group, participation in non-academic aspects of college-life was minimal. Few had participated in extracurricular activities or events. Not only did this tend to isolate them from other learners, it also served to isolate them from the college itself. This study identified the phenomenon of what might be called the ‘Wash ‘n’ Go’ students - students whose engagement in

higher education is restricted to formal academic engagements and not involving other socio-cultural aspects of college life. They arrived; they sat in lectures; they went home (Redmond, 2004: awaiting publication, Redmond, 2003). For some 'wash 'n' go' students, graduation ceremonies were the only fully 'extra-curricula' activities in which they participated. This could further emphasise the sense of isolation. Students often felt angry by the limited range of suitable extracurricular opportunities. Most isolated of all were the part-time students:

'My feeling was that we walked out into the room and stayed in that room until it was time to go home and that was it. You didn't have to be here. You could do that anywhere'. ('Caroline', Interview I: 159 – 161).

'Sort of on the fringe, aren't we? Perhaps we shouldn't be, but I think by the end of the degree all our [modules] have been six till eight or seven till nine, something like that [...] coming in after a day's work when really, most of the college is quite empty ... we just come in, see people who are on the course with us [...] and then go off and do our work'. ('Alice': Tracer: 66-70)

When extracurricular options were available – such as travelling to Wales for a field trip – students with family and work responsibilities were frequently unable to attend. This served to distance them further from fellow students and staff:

'I had work commitments. I thought we were told on the last minute – 'You're going on these dates'. So I went to see the Head of Sport and went, 'Look, I can't do it. I've got work commitments'. And he said, 'It's not a good enough excuse. If you give your work three weeks' notice, they have to give you time off work'. And I said, 'But that's an ideal world. I'm going to have to go to my employer and say, 'In three weeks' time, I'm going off work'. I said, 'Are you going to pay my mortgage while I'm away? I can't afford to take a week off work'. ('Danny': Interview: 169 – 175).



# **Chapter 7: 'Economies of Experience': Widening Participation Students and the World of Work**

## **Introduction**

The quotation from Pierre Bourdieu that began this thesis asserted very strongly that the education system is hierarchically structured, and affects categories of students to differing degrees. It is the assertion of this thesis, however, that particular categories of students, such as the widening participation students in this study, are particularly affected, so much so that they became 'outcasts on the inside'. Chapter 6 above indicated that the students experienced this sense of separateness for, struggling with multiple demands from families, jobs and the like they effectively became what I have called '*Wash 'n Go*' students.

Taking the theme further, the stratified nature of HE and HE experiences has implications for the career aspirations and expectations of the widening participation students. Interlinked with wider social factors (class and gender particularly) including the physical location of their studies within a relatively depressed region of England, higher education has important consequences for their perspectives and expectations of the sample with regard to their future employment. Their espoused relationship to the world of work is the focus of this chapter. We begin by considering what the students consider they will finish their higher education with before considering their career and work aspirations.

## **'The Credential Nexus'**

Having only limited engagement with the college, widening participation students tended to conceptualise higher education in terms of academic achievement, what others have called the

**'credential nexus' (Brown and Scase, 1994). In this, they were 'exam hounds', fully committed to 'the cult of the grade' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994). What counted was the final grade; anything less than a 'reasonable' mark was unthinkable.**

**'There's a lot of young people who aren't focused, who come here because it's the best thing to do. We see it in the classes all the time, and they get a degree that really isn't going to be any use to them at the end of the day. To me, if you spend three years at university, you've got to get a decent degree. My nephew's come out with a third. I would be devastated with a third. I would have to do the whole thing over again. ('Hayley': Focus Group IV: 305-310).**

**Students were aware of other differences between themselves and those from other backgrounds. The perception was that younger students, particularly those aged in their late teens and early twenties, were unworldly and less inclined to hard work. For them, higher education was a multi-dimensional social and cultural experience, one in which academic success assumed an important but not all-consuming role.**

**Such classifications, however, offered a useful source for my analysis. By seeking to classify others, widening participation students were also positioning themselves:**

**'We end up giving advice to the younger one's. You feel like their mother! I mean, we're old enough to be some of their mothers, but when it comes to degree work, they're not very forthcoming. But there's just no social life for mature students, so we'll make our own arrangements. You'd like to be part of it. ('Jo': Focus Group II: 115-118).**

**A single-minded pursuit of the 'credential nexus', could lead, for some, to disillusionment. When viewed through the lens of a negative habitus, widening participation students approached higher education in the expectation that it would be academically challenging. There**



was also a feeling that it would be beyond their capabilities. Such impressions appeared to have originated from access programmes. Discovering that 'university' was within the scope of ones abilities could, in some instances, lead to an almost paradoxical sense of disappointment:

'I expected it to be more intense than it has been, personally. And I'm not being flippant by saying it's not been as hard as I'd expected. I don't want to be as crass as that. I thought it would be more intense in that you would spend more times doing things outside. I expected a level for lecturers to be at that I would find hard to grasp, and that has never happened. It's not as intense'.

('Bob': Focus Group III: 61-65)

The 'credential nexus' would have other implications for widening participation students, particularly in terms of cultural capital. The implications of this are explored below.

### **The changing importance of cultural capital**

'We would have loved to have gone to the Ball. We were going to go to the Student Ball, but we feel it's more aimed at people on campus who seem to be more involved ... even going over the road to the Union you feel a bit out of it'

('Samantha': Focus Group III: 109 – 111)

As the above extract suggests, these widening participation students were characterised by a limited engagement in the non-academic aspects of higher education. Disengagement could also deprive them from those 'transformative' aspects of higher education, which, it has been argued, are gained through participation in extracurricular activities such as playing sports, joining societies and travelling. Brown and Scase (1994) conclude that this type of cultural capital is highly valued by employers – particularly those operating in 'traditional'<sup>21</sup> graduate recruitment markets. A similar point was made

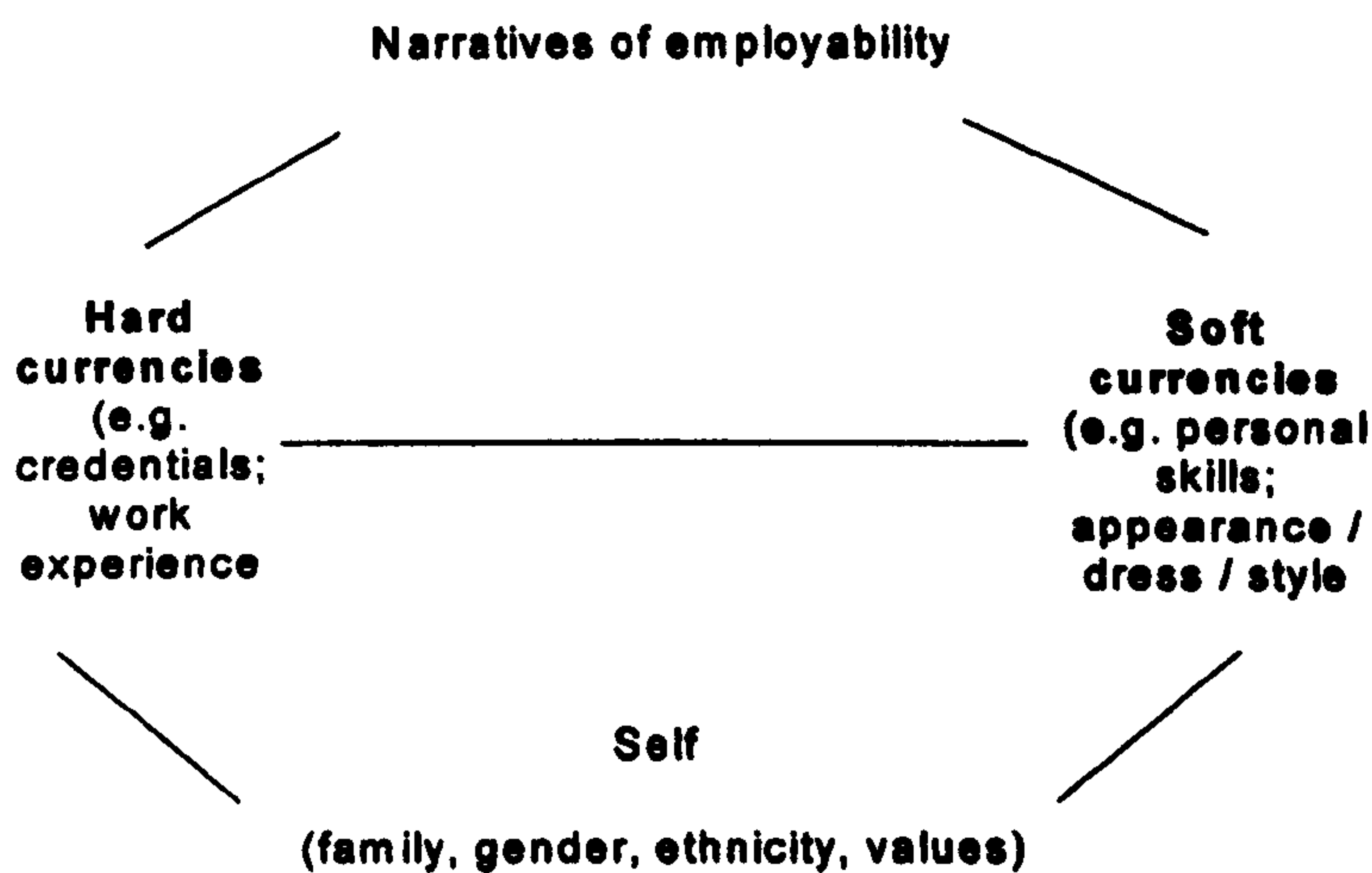
---

<sup>21</sup> In this sense, the term 'traditional' is used to denote large organisations running annual graduate recruitment and selection programmes.

by Warhurst and Nickson (2001) who suggest that the prominence of the service sector in recruitment markets is leading to employers placing added emphases on cultural capital and the formulation of a 'personality package' which must be 'sold' in the marketplace (Brown and Hesketh (2004a, p.35).

For Brown and Hesketh (2004, p.35), 'the self is a key economic resource; 'who you are' matters as much as 'what you know'. Consequently, what they term 'personal capital' rests on the acquisition of 'hard' and 'soft currencies' (See Figure 7.1 below). 'Hard currencies' include academic credentials, work experience, sporting or musical achievements and overseas travelling. 'Soft currencies' include factors such as interpersonal skills, charisma, appearance, accent and style of dress. Brown and Hesketh (2004, p.35) suggest that 'soft currencies' are assuming a greater importance than 'hard currencies', as part of the explicit criteria utilised within graduate recruitment campaigns.

Figure 7.1.The social construction of personal capital



Source: Brown and Hesketh, 2004, p.35

The use of cultural capital in recruitment is seen as part of a wider trend in which aspects of everyday life are subsumed or penetrated within 'an economy of experience'. In this, social class, gender and ethnic identities are merged together into a 'narrative of employment'.



Effectively, such developments discriminate against the students in this study as they were engaged primarily in the acquisition of 'hard currencies' such as academic credentials at the expense of engagement in extracurricular opportunities integral to 'soft currencies'. At least partly, this shortcoming was due to institutional habitus, and the consequent lack of options acceptable to older students at the college. On the other hand, we should not forget that the students' external responsibilities (work, families) left them with little time for non-academic pursuits.

### **Social Class ambivalence and 'Imputations of superiority'**

Britton and Baxter (2001) suggest that the experience of higher education caused the widening participation students to 'imputations of superiority' over others from similar backgrounds. Entry to higher education, for working class people, was equated to becoming middle class. Indeed, social class was an issue discussed on a number of occasions in the fieldwork, particularly when the students involved were studying social science subjects. The students were ambivalent towards such perceptions. Whilst they were aware that studying for a degree was a middle class tradition, and could cause their social class status, theoretically, to be changed. There was also a perception that, by entering higher education they had somehow 'decoded' the system. In doing so, they would, like middle class people, be able to use this knowledge and experience to the advantage of children, friends and relatives.

There thus was ambivalence about class identity, expressed well by Jill:

'I still consider myself working class, although I do feel I have raised my children middle class [...]. But the morals and values I've instilled into my children are working class morals and values. It's tricky really, because I feel a bit of a hypocrite'. ('Jill': Interview II, 17-21).

This quotation is interesting because it inter-relates two concepts of social class – one about values and morals, the other about ways of behaving and material circumstances (*'I have raised my children middle class'*). For Jill, though reflexive, the two senses of class are distinct.

While being careful not to imply superiority over others, there was awareness by the students that their higher education had repositioned them within their own social groups. This repositioning was conceptualised in a number of ways: changed accents, new ways of spending leisure time, familiarity with cultural artefacts and venues (museums, galleries, etc.). There was also a realisation that their aspirations and goals set them apart from others. Recounting a family argument, a student reported how relatives had accused her of changing her political allegiances, an accusation she fervently denied:

**'Why do you want to go out and work?' Because I want my children to be able to go out and work and not sit at home. 'Well, that's Conservative, isn't it?' It's not bloody Conservative. It's my belief. I want my children to go out and get a good job. At the end of the day, I've got to think about my future. I've got no pension, no security. What am I going to live on, a state pension? My political views haven't changed, it's just a matter of you go out and work for what you get. It's a struggle'. ('Alison': Interview II: 194-203).**

Despite ambivalences, self-imputation of superiority was something that students were at times prepared to engage in, particularly when recounting episodes of how they had surpassed expectations. One student (F12) dedicated her final-year dissertation to an ex-husband who, by divorcing her had provided an incentive to enrol on the *Reach Out* access programme. Another (F8) described how her level of education would soon exceed that of her child's teachers – teachers who, in the past, had been reluctant to interact with her. Others (M16; M24) described the sense of bewildered pride with



which their elderly parents now viewed their educational achievements.

## **Work aspirations and 'realities'**

Despite the availability of large-scale, data-rich, longitudinal surveys (Purcell and Elias, 2004), few studies have sought to explore the transition to work post-degree qualitatively from the perspective of widening participation students. This study has sought to do that, teasing out the work or career aspirations (a middle class concept (Watts, 1996a, Watts, 2001, Watts, 1996c) and then considering the implications of those findings for the careers service as well as the model of student motivations and job market involvement (Brown and Scase, 1994).

## **Students' career aspirations**

Table 7.2 below provides a summary of students' career aspirations as recorded in the final year of their degree programmes, and their actual destinations at the time of the tracer interviews in January 2004. Apart from teaching, few students articulated career aspirations in relation to specific occupations, or sectors. Of the 28 students who participated in the interviews, focus groups and tracer studies, 7 aspired to teacher training, and 11 had no immediate plans for leaving their current employment, although this should not be taken to assume that they were content in that employment or had ruled out future change. Instead, many just wanted their degrees to make a difference:

'I would like in my career to make an impression on someone – to know you've done something ... it would be nice to know, even if one person says it' ('Karen': Focus Group IV: 409 -411).

Table 7.2 Students' aspirations compared to recorded destinations

	<i>M / F</i>	<i>Degree subject</i>	<i>Career aspiration</i>	<i>Destination as at Jan. 2004</i>
1	F	Identity Studies / Sociology	Prison service, Ed. Psych or counselling	Unknown
2	F	Identity Studies / Sociology	Domiciliary Care Manager	Re-sitting final year
3	F	Sociology / IT	Social work-related	Re-sitting final year
4	M	BAPD	Undecided	Administration, education
5	M	Geography / American Studies	Housing officer	Housing officer (same employment)
6	M	Business / IT	IT consultant, multi-media	Temporary work, applying for PGCE
7	M	Sociology / IT	Undecided	Unknown
8	F	Sociology / IT	Teacher training	Temporary work
9	F	Sociology / IT	Social enterprise	Temporary work / Community work
10	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Foreman, manufacturing firm
11	F	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Factory worker (same employment)
12	F	Prof. Development	Civil Servant	Civil servant (same employment)
13	F	Prof. Development	Administrator	Administrator, higher education (same employment)
14	F	Education Studies	Teacher training	Teaching assistant, re-applying for PGCE
15	F	Prof. Development	Administrator	Administrator, higher education
16	M	Theology & Religious Studies	Teacher training	Teacher training / supply teacher
17	F	English & IT	Teacher training	Literacy support worker / re-applying for PGCE
18	F	English & IT	Teacher training	Unemployed / applying for PGCE
19	F	Psychology & Sports Studies	Community work, unspecified	Re-sitting final year, Voluntary work
20	F	Sociology & IT	Undecided	Re-sitting final year
21	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Factory worker / applying for M.Sc.
22	M	Prof. Development	Local government team worker	Local government worker (same employment)
23	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Factory worker (same employment)
24	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Factory worker (same employment)
25	M	Sports & Physical Recreation	Teacher training	Enrolled on PGCE
26	M	Sports & Physical Recreation	Teacher training	Nightclub security guard / re-applying for PGCE
27	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	Factory worker / applying for MBA
28	M	Prof. Development	Remain in current employment	HR manager

Career aspirations were found to link directly to patterns of enrolment and student experience. Enrolling at Liverpool Hope was a 'decision'



not a 'choice' (Ball et al., 2002). Alternative institutions or study programmes were rarely considered. As few students in the group were informed consumers (relying in most cases on the advice of access tutors and friends), the decision to enrol was 'pragmatic' and 'rational' rather than strategic and vocational. Even the University College itself was selected more on the basis of geographical location, and its reputation for being 'good for mature students'.

The decision to enrol was also informed, to a large extent, by habitus-based motivations. This, typically, served to prioritise the acquisition of academic credentials. What mattered was obtaining a degree.

By prioritising the pursuit of 'hard' academic credentials over 'soft' cultural capital, including engaging with careers personnel, the career aspirations of the students remained undeveloped and sketchy. Lacking exposure to other students and other patterns of graduate careers, and without biographically based experiences of alternative 'careers' or 'career choices', the widening participation students did not appear to acquire alternative career models that might transform their work habitus. Indeed, few students throughout the fieldwork used the term 'career' in relation to their own or their families' experiences of employment<sup>22</sup>. Instead, 'job' was the preferred term. This appeared to be more than an issue of semantics for 'career' is invested with numerous cultural and social values and relates traditionally to middle class, professional patterns of employment. 'Job' on the other hand, is less culturally specific and more functional. The nuances of this distinction were not lost on widening participation students, who frequently discussed employment in highly generalist, non-specific terms:

'I think it's nice to think in the future, or when you're finished, to do something that you couldn't have done without your degree. Those five years have got to be worth something [...] to know that more doors are open. I can do something that I couldn't do before, that's important. It's not

---

<sup>22</sup> QSR NUDIST software enabled me to search all interview and focus group transcripts for the frequency with which key words were used.

just about money; it's about giving yourself more opportunities'. ('Karen' Focus Group IV: 428-433)

For many students, 'doing something that you couldn't have done without your degree' was the common sentiment and formed the main consideration in students' aspirations. Getting the qualification was still the most important aspect.

### **Orientations to Work**

Early on in the study, it was perceived that Brown and Scase's (1994) 'career orientation' model offered an alternative approach to exploring career aspirations. Despite Bourdieu's claim that the use of 'typologies' amount to 'semi-scholarly taxonomies' (Bourdieu, 1988, p.12), I found the model provided a framework for the students to discuss, and reflect upon, career aspirations. Brown and Scase (1994, p.89 - 96: see also Chapter 3.2.1 ) identified six career attitude 'clusters', which they divided into '*conformist*' and '*non-conformist*'<sup>23</sup> orientations. Question 11 in the questionnaire was based upon Brown and Scase's (1994) categories. Respondents were required to consider each career orientation in turn before identifying, in order of preference, those that they believed most closely reflected their own career orientations. In total, 67 students completed this section of the questionnaire. Table 7.3 provides a summary of the data.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Chapter 3 for a more comprehensive discussion on Brown and Scase's career orientation model.



Table 7.3. Career orientations among final year students

Career orientation	Number of times allocated:		
	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Ranking			
Conformist			
<i>Traditional Bureaucratic</i>	17	6	15
<i>Flexible</i>	13	6	16
<i>Entrepreneur</i>	10	4	5
<b>Total Conformist</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36</b>
Non-Conformist			
<i>Drop-Out</i>	3	2	6
<i>Ritualist</i>	1	4	5
<i>Socially Committed</i>	22	10	7
<b>Total Non-Conformist</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>18</b>

Table 7.3 shows that *conformist* attitudes predominated. Forty students prioritised *conformist* orientations first whilst 26 prioritised *non-conformist* orientations. When disaggregated, *traditional bureaucratic* (working in companies) was the most frequently selected *conformist* attitude, followed by *flexible* and *entrepreneur*. Despite the overall preference for *conformist* orientations, however, it was a *non-conformist* orientation, *socially committed*, that was the modal category. In contrast, the other two *non-conformist* orientations, *ritualist* and *drop out*, were the least selected of the six.

The data obtained from Question 11 suggests that students at Liverpool Hope have a predominantly 'conformist' orientation to work – one centred on traditional concepts of organisations and organisational structures. This was broadly consistent with Brown and Scase's (1994) hypothesis that due to social and economic factors, students at new universities and colleges would be less likely to appreciate the shift in organisational culture from 'bureaucratic' to 'adaptive' models within the economy. Unlike this study, however, the authors did not have an opportunity to record students' career

aspirations over a longitudinal period<sup>24</sup>. This meant they would have been unable to assess the extent that aspirations evolved over time.

This study did find that career aspirations were adapted and refocused as new information (and experience) became available. As with the decision to enrol, career aspirations were subject to *turning points*, as evidenced by students who, upon learning that their application for teacher training had been rejected, announced that teaching had never really been their ambition before refocusing on another occupation. In effect, aspirations often consisted of combinations of multiple 'attitudes', and only rarely consistently reflected one dominant 'attitude'.

Many of these combinations contained some inherent logic. Students that selected *traditional bureaucratic* attitude, for example, often did so in combination with *flexible* and *entrepreneur*. Similarly, those students who selected *socially committed* frequently did so in combination with *entrepreneur* and, to a lesser extent, *flexible*, suggesting possibilities of social entrepreneurship (MSEI, 2004). Jill's career aspirations, for example, were both entrepreneurial and socially committed. Her aim was to work in the 'social enterprise' sector – profit-making businesses whose aim is to benefit the local community. Among the students, the predominance of the *socially committed* orientation suggests that Brown and Scase's (1994) classification requires some development, seeing social commitment (e.g. public service or charity work) as 'non-conformist'. Within the economic context of Merseyside where the public sector is the largest employer, social commitment is likely to be highly conformist. Additionally, particular types of jobs within the public sector, such as social work and teaching, simultaneously can be socially committed and conformist. Brown and Scase's (1994) categorisation appears to make few allowances for such combinations, concentrating primarily on private enterprise occupations at the expense of many state-based

---

<sup>24</sup> Brown and Scase (1994, p.51) conducted in-depth interviews with 20 students from three institutions. Interviews took place approximately 18 months after graduation.



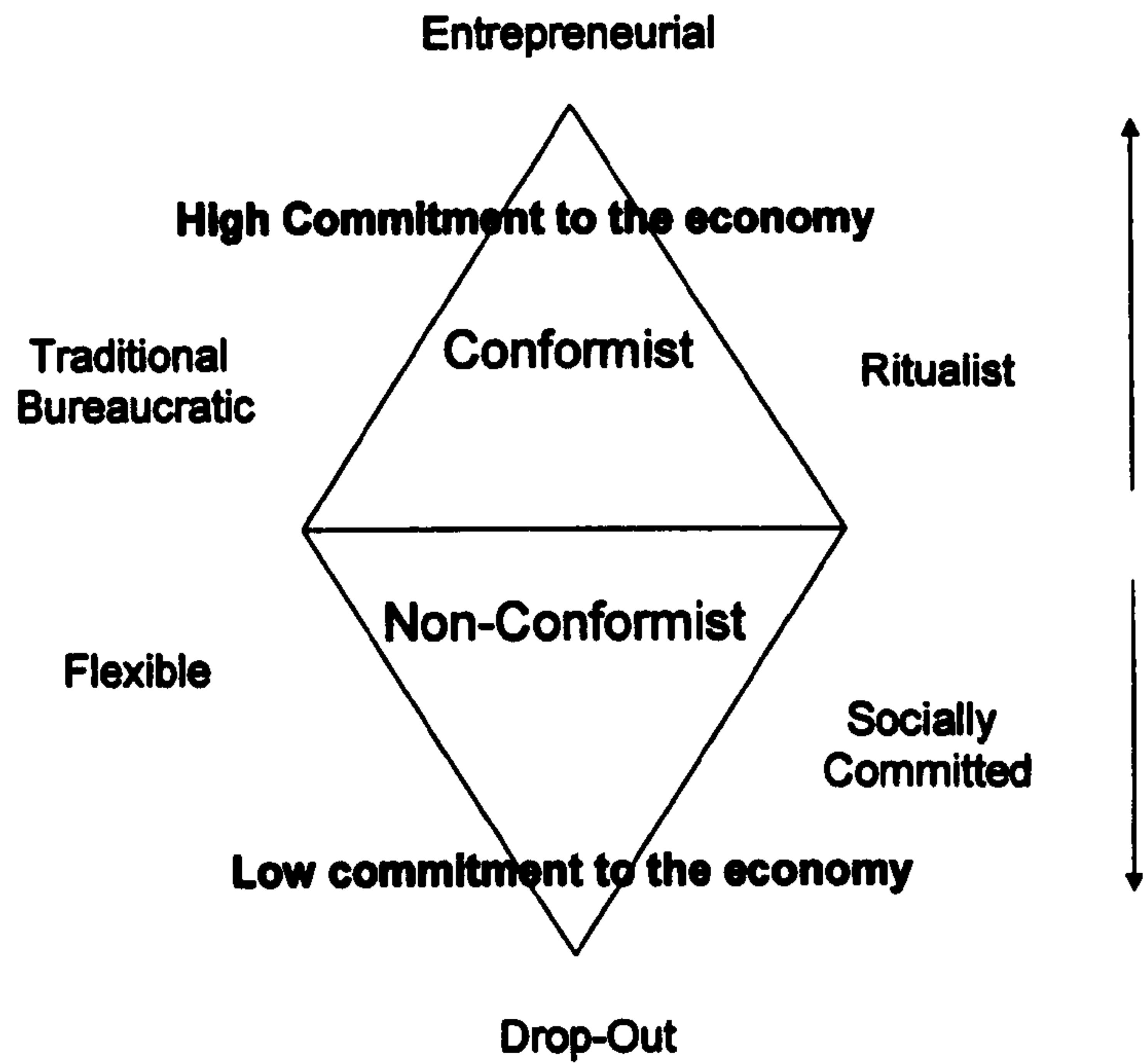
alternatives. Additionally, Brown and Scase's (1994) categories appear to allow for no movement between categories.

This is not to imply that the model is invalid. The overarching distinction of *conformist* and *non-conformist* remains useful in exploring the extent that students were committed to pursuing organisational careers as central to their personal development. Organisational concepts such as 'adaptive' and 'bureaucratic' were also effective in exploring the impact of corporate restructuring on students' attitudes to employment. However, several concerns remained. First, the model is at least ten years old. During the intervening period both higher education and the graduate job market have undergone significant expansion and change. Economically, politically and socially, the context within which students now operate is different from that of the early 1990s. Secondly, Brown and Scase (1994) developed their hypothesis by working with 'traditional' students. To what extent would it apply to widening participation students such as those at Liverpool Hope?

### **'Career orientations' at Liverpool Hope**

In applying Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientations model in the context of Liverpool Hope, this study found that the relationship between 'career orientations' was more dynamic than first understood. One 'problem' was the apparently linear arrangement of the six career orientations, as presented by Brown and Scase (1994). This arrangement made it difficult to understand how different orientations related to each other, or how students could display preferences for both *conformist* and *non-conformist* orientations. To counteract this, I have assembled the six orientations according to a new diagrammatic arrangement (Diagram 7.4).

Diagram 7.4. Revised career orientations model



In the diagram (7.4) it can be seen that in line with Brown and Scase's (1994) theory, the six 'career orientations' are positioned according to their 'conformist' (pro-traditional capitalist) or 'non-conformist' status. Thus, *traditional bureaucratic*, *entrepreneurial*, and *ritualist* are assembled around the 'conformist' triangle, while *flexible*, *socially committed* and *drop out* are assembled around the 'non-conformist' triangle. Following this, individual student orientations reveal dynamic relationships between certain conceptual orientations. An above average number of students, for instance, who prioritised the '*traditional bureaucratic*' orientation were also found to prioritise a *ritualist* orientation to work and the economy. Other correlations existed between '*flexible*' and '*entrepreneurial*', and '*flexible*' and '*socially committed*'. Similarly, while relatively few students displayed preferences for *ritualist* orientations, such students were more likely than other *non-conformists* to identify with *conformist* orientations. For such reasons, both these orientations were located on the intersection points. *Drop-outs*, in Brown and Scase's (1994) analysis, represented a non-engagement in the economy.



## Extending the Typology: Identification of sub-orientations

From the data, it became apparent that student career orientations were more complex than recognised by Brown and Scase's (1994) six categories. Furthermore, trends in the job market had led to the creation of new employment sectors and changes in employment, such as the increased development of portfolio careers. The students in turn represented a combination of several orientations. Among the 'conformist' orientations, for example, it is possible to identify a '*flexible bureaucratic*' position similar to that exhibited by Susan. In recent years, such orientations have been termed, 'intrapreneurial' – entrepreneurship undertaken by employees within organisations (Moreland, 2003).

It is also possible from the data, to identify a *social enterprise* orientation, similar to that expressed by Jill. 'Social enterprise' represents a growing field of employment, particularly in Merseyside, which has the largest social enterprise sector in the UK. Students with this aspiration are attracted to profit and non-profit making organisations within a community-orientated sector. Of the six Brown and Scase (1994) categories, '*drop out*' was the least selected of all. Students found the term problematic. 'Opting in', not 'dropping out', was the challenge faced by widening participation students. Furthermore, as several students noted, it costs money to drop out.

'Dropping out' was even less of an option if the student had children. Though few in number, those that came closest to expressing '*drop out*' orientations, however, were *ritualists*. Typically, the *ritualists* in the sample represented one of two 'positions' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999). The first position is the '*resigned ritualist*', and consisted of students engaged in low-level, usually poorly paid, jobs in the local economy. Without the financial security to 'drop out,' the students had few options but to continue in this employment. *Resigned ritualists* are identified in the literature through their engagement in non-graduate employment (Purcell and Elias, 2004, Elias and Purcell, 2003). The second, I termed, '*pragmatic ritualists*'.

Typically, such students are content with 'going along with things' in exchange for the material and psychological benefits attached to working for traditionally bureaucratic organisations – pensions, increments, relative job security.

As with Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientation model, these refined sub-orientations must inevitably be speculative. Graduate job markets are evolving, and in the face of such changes, student aspirations tended to be tentative. However, the developed model offers a useful framework from which to explore the dynamics of career orientation. The introduction of sub-orientation categories provides an opportunity to update the model by showing how Brown and Scase's (1994) original career orientations have evolved over time.

### *'Those who can, teach'*

Within the sample, teaching informed all career aspirations and shaped all career discussions. Even among those whose career aspirations were uncertain, the option of teacher training was ever-present:

'I wanted to do teaching when I started and now I'm sort of wavering. But I'm still not settled on what I want to do.'

(Focus Group IV: 417 – 418).

On one level, teaching was almost an expectation, particularly among women. These widening participation students effectively operated within narrow 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). In educational terms, alternative 'choices' were rarely considered (Ball et al., 2002). At the same time, the advice of tutors and 'informed' others took on disproportionate levels of importance. Teaching also represented a 'graduate' profession, one invested with significant levels of cultural capital but within reach, especially where the occupation resonated with cultural norms of 'women's work'. For a widening participation student to be told by her tutor that she would



**'make a good teacher' could amount to no less than a 'consecration' (Bourdieu, 1988).**

**Teachers could also represent the cultural yardsticks against which students in the sample measured their educational progress. Encountered daily in their children's schools, teachers seemed to symbolise the effortless embodiment of educational capital. Becoming as educated as a teacher was for some students the real mark of educational achievement:**

**'I've changed in a way, I've become more confident. When you go to schools and places you know, one time you thought teachers were ... *professionals*, but now because where I am you find you've caught up to them and in some ways you've surpassed them'. ('Alison': Interview II: 296-300).**

**In practical terms, teaching was a highly visible career option, not surprising, as the College owed its origins, main business and habitus to teacher training. Teaching offers reasonable pay, decent holidays and the guarantee of a year's funded postgraduate training, for at the time of the study, national recruitment drives were seeking to make the profession more attractive to mature students (AGCAS, 2003b). Few other careers within students' horizons for action could compete. Many of the students' subject lecturers also taught on the PGCE. The option of teacher training was never far away.**

**For male students, teaching was attractive for other reasons. Several men recounted stories in which male teachers had risen rapidly through the profession to become head teachers. These were not considered to be outstanding teachers; their advancement had been due to an under-represented gender. By final year, some of these stories had acquired the status and appeal of urban myths:**

**'I'd be a liar if I didn't say that the other thing that was pointing me in that direction was the chance of promotion**

– basically, being male in that role. Obviously, coming in and being male: I'd be a liar if I didn't say that was part of the interest'. ('Danny': Interview I: 244-246).

At the same time, teaching also depends upon 'soft currencies' such as cultural capital (Brown and Hesketh, 2004b). This was an aspect of teaching that widening participation students were unprepared for, and which could ultimately prove decisive. During one tracer interview, 'Andy' recounted attending a PGCE interview in which the conversation had turned to books. An ex-engineer in his mid 50s, Andy was particularly conscious of being less well read than other applicants:

'Books weren't common in our house – *Beano* and *Dandy* at Christmas. My parents weren't ... Great parents! But they weren't into education really. So I wasn't a reader [...] and people have been surprised at how poorly read I am. There was one class; they were doing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The teacher assumed that I would have definitely read that particular book, and when I said I hadn't, the surprise on her face stays with me, you know? I should have read it'. ('Andy': Tracer Interview: 194-203).

For Andy, books embodied the soft currency of a school's cultural capital, a currency to which he had had limited access. Without the right sort of cultural capital, Andy would remain an outsider, constantly risking similar exposures when mixing with other teachers.

### *Use of the careers service*

Only nine of the 28 students who participated in interviews and focus groups had made use of the careers service while in college. Of these, eight had attended specifically to request assistance with PGCE applications. From the fieldwork, the careers service emerged as 'not very inviting' or aimed primarily at 'younger students'. One problem seemed to be a perception that the careers service operated



on a self-help basis, when widening participation students expected a more direct approach:

'It would be good if someone could come round and tell us what options we should take. You know, give a lecture and give options to people' ('Karen': Focus Group IV: 460-461).

Students enrolled on part-time degree programmes were least likely of all to use the careers service or other student services. One reason for this was that some part-time students only attended the college in the evening at times when most services were closed. Another was that several of these were already in employment and were thus not directly engaged in seeking alternative occupations. Students were, however, in favour of careers education when integrated into the core curriculum. At Liverpool Hope, all level 1 students undertake a generic module entitled, '*Unique Learning*'. Careers education is an integral feature of this module. Widening participation students' responses to *Unique Learning* were highly favourable:

'I just think, you know... it brought home for me, for example, CV writing. That's stuff I deal with in my paid job'. ('Jill': Tracer interview: 70 – 72).

The study found that, for widening participation students, an 'integrated' model of career guidance provision (Watts, 1996c, Watts, 1997b), in which career modules were threaded into core academic curricula, would seem to be more suitable. Widening participation students, due to the nature of their engagement in the college, remained unlikely to utilise central student services voluntarily. Taking the services to them, via their academic programmes, was a necessary response.

It was apparent from the tracer interviews that none of the twenty-eight students were in 'fast track' jobs, as defined by HEFCE (CIHE, 2004). Nor were students' earnings comparable to nationally reported 'averages', which placed graduate earnings for 2003 at £18, 362 (ICG, 2004). Geographically all remained in Merseyside and were therefore subject to local economic conditions (see Chapter 1 section 8). Students that fared best were those who were already employed upon enrolling. Most of these remained working in the same job, for the same employer. Even with a degree, for most students, patterns and conditions of employment remained the same as before.

The experiences of the group contrasted with the largely 'buoyant' picture portrayed in some of the key literature (Prospects, 2004, Purcell and Elias, 2004). The most striking finding related to teacher training. Of the 28 students 'traced' by this study, seven had initially planned to train as teachers. However, by January 2004, only two of these had secured places on PGCE programmes. The remaining five had been rejected at various stages of the application process. Feedback from selectors invariably focused on students' academic backgrounds. Competition for PGCE places appears to have led to credential inflation. Even though each student applying for teacher training met the statutory academic requirements, few could offer the grades or subjects of study sought by courses.

Four students failed to complete their final year and, at the time of the tracers, were engaged in re-sitting modules. In the meantime, each of these students had taken up part-time employment, primarily in the service sector.



## **Conclusion**

The study has found that widening participation students enrol in higher education as the result of highly pragmatic 'decisions'. These decisions are informed by narrow horizons for action and often triggered by complex biographical turning points. Enrolment, for the students, is frequently an expression of habitus. Once in higher education, the experience of widening participation students is characterised by a highly fragmented, 'wash 'n' go' existence, balanced between competing worlds of home, college and work. With minimal engagement in non-academic aspects of college life, widening participation students acquire educational credentials, but it seems limited cultural capital. In turn, this can contribute to narrow career aspirations, which lead, almost inevitably, to sub-degree level work in local job markets. However, it must be stressed that after graduation, students remained buoyant and optimistic of their prospects. Attaining a university degree represented, for all of those involved in the study, a considerable personal achievement. This achievement was likely to have far reaching consequences – personal, social and perhaps, economic. The experience of these widening participation students would seem to confirm Bourdieu's claim that higher education reproduces existing social inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1994). Perhaps the ultimate 'misrecognition' was that they appeared not to see this for themselves.

# **Chapter 8: Review and reflections**

## **Advance organiser**

The aim of this final chapter is to engage in a reflexive discussion on the wider implications of the study. The chapter begins by reconsidering the research issues, asking how significant they were in light of the discussion in Chapter 6. There then follows a reconsideration of the methodology. The chapter will reflect on the implications of the study from three perspectives: widening participation students; careers services in higher education; and, finally, the college itself. This will lead, in turn, to a consideration of the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a personal account of the research process, including some suggested areas for future research, and the impact the study has had on my professional practice.

## **Review of initial issues**

As discussed in Chapter 1 (section 3) three inter-related issues have informed this study. In summary, these are as follows:

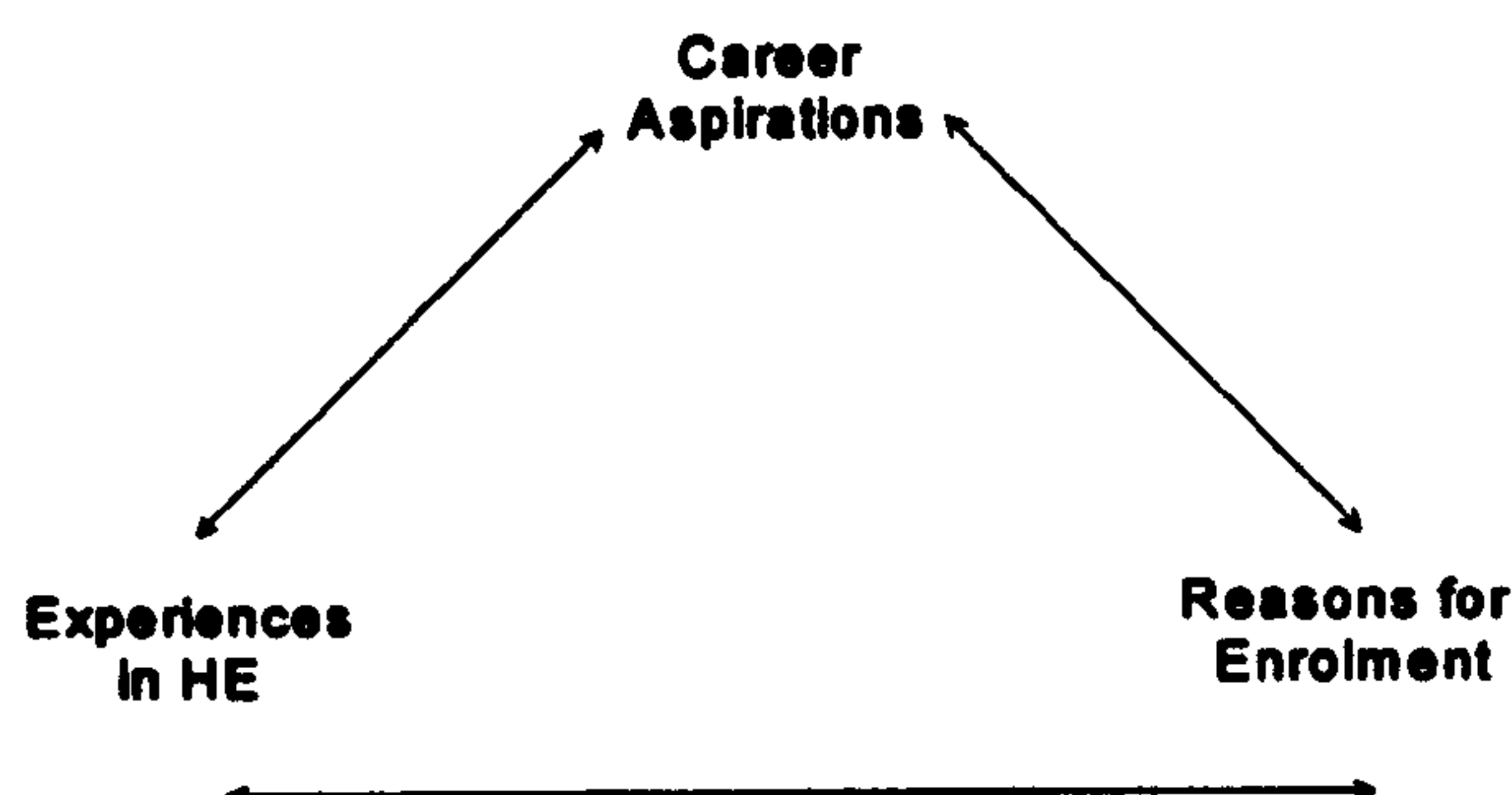
1. Why do students from widening participation backgrounds enrol in higher education? What are the factors and influences that motivate them?
2. How do students from widening participation backgrounds experience higher education?
3. What do widening participation students aspire to after graduation? To what extent do aspirations become 'realities' in post-HE job markets? How do widening participation students interact with the careers service?

As the study has unfolded, the inter-relatedness of the research issues has become increasingly apparent. Motivations for entering higher education could influence students' patterns of engagement.



These, in turn, could shape and inform career aspirations. Figure 8.1 is an attempt at illustrating this.

Figure 8.1. Charting the relationship between the research issues



## Methodology

The methodology was designed with the purpose of bringing to light the experiences, insights and aspirations of a specific group of widening participation students. The aim, as far as possible, was to create environments of 'active and methodical listening' (Bourdieu, 1999, p.609). Reflecting on the methodology, several points are worth considering.

### *Sampling*

In a discussion on methodology, Bourdieu (1999, p.610) argued that 'social proximity' and 'familiarity' provided two essential preconditions to 'non-violent' communication. I found this approach, at first, challenging. I knew the majority of the 28 students before the study. The concern was that this would eventually impair, or reduce, the 'objectivity' of the study. However, on reflection, such 'proximity' possibly enabled a closer rapport. It also enabled me to meet with students more frequently, and less 'officially' during the period of research. The effect of this was to enable a greater depth of understanding to be developed by myself and the students, many of whom used the research – and the tracer studies in particular – to be

reflective about their higher education experiences and work aspirations.

The sample of students was, in terms of age, educational background, geographical location, representative of widening participation students at Liverpool Hope. As the focus group transcripts illustrate (see Appendix 5) the students shared common socio-biographical and educational characteristics. Of the 28, the vast majority had entered via *Reach Out* – Liverpool Hope's designated access programme. This tended to give the group a shared cohesion, a sense of being different from other students.

## ***Methods***

The most significant strength of the methodology was the longitudinal 'tracer' component, which, I believe, marks the study out from similar research. Following the students during the period of their transition from HE to employment provided a first-hand opportunity to witness the interaction of widening participation students in regional job markets – markets in which, traditionally university careers services have been less involved in (Watts, 1996c). It also facilitated a comparison between career aspirations and actual 'realities' as perceived and vocalised by the students.

Of the four methods, data from the questionnaire was the least utilised. There are several reasons for this. The questionnaire was administered to approximately 150 students across a range of undergraduate degree programmes. Of this, around half were completed and returned. The data provided a useful insight into students' employment patterns (e.g. hours worked per week, etc.) and their current attitudes to employment. However, integrating this data into the study has proven problematic because the anonymous nature of the responses made it difficult to ensure that those students who responded were emphatically from the target group.



In contrast, data obtained from the interviews, focus groups and tracer interviews was extremely rich. Like West (1996, p.13) I too found that no 'final, definitive 'truths' emerged. Instead, the stories recorded in the transcripts represent stories told in particular contexts, at particular times, between particular people. I believe the study has relevance beyond itself, but it is up to others as well as me to substantiate this. Crucially, as West (1996, p.13) argued: 'The texts are open to further interpretation and the story is never complete'.

In terms of the data, I was aware during the interviews that more information was available on reasons for enrolment and experiences in higher education, than on links with the careers service. This was not deliberate. Rather, it reflected students' own priorities, and the reality that few students had had anything but fleeting contact with the careers service. Consequently, this aspect of the research remains sketchy and under-developed, though higher education careers services do need to monitor their penetration of such cohorts of students, and devise strategies both to reach them and to provide a service relevant to their needs.

### **Widening participation students**

This study offers insight into a neglected dimension of the widening participation student experience. The widening participation students in this study entered the 'field' of higher education on the basis of limited information. Motivated primarily by a 'credential nexus' (Brown and Scase, 1994) strongly supported by an ethos of self-fulfilment and development, their experiences were characterised by a distant, at times non-existent engagement with the social and cultural aspects of higher education. Partly as a result of this and the institutional habitus, career aspirations among this group tended to be narrowly defined and self-confirming. Beyond teaching – the one dominant career aspiration - students displayed a limited understanding of alternative options, though many had a social-improvement motivation to work.

Few of those in the study applied for, nor competed in the 'traditional' graduate job market. It is not possible definitively to say if this market, as symbolised by recruitment fairs, 'milk rounds' and glossy recruitment brochures was relevant to them or not. The fact is they were disengaged from it at all levels. This could have been deliberate: according to Bourdieu (1988), agents adjust their career aspirations according to the opportunities available. It was unlikely, however, that this disengagement totally was an act of personal agency. Few of these students appeared aware that a 'graduate' job market existed, or that it applied to them. Instead, employment opportunities were conceptualised in localised terms – local jobs, local firms, and local training programmes. Given the nature of the local Merseyside economy, i.e. the relative absence of growth industries, large private sector employers, etc., this appeared to lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. It has been claimed that widening participation students are less likely than others to secure employment commensurate with higher qualifications (Hill, 2004, Hesketh, 2001, Mail, 2004, Baldwin and Halpin, 2004). This study would seem to offer some limited evidence for this. Out of the 28 who were involved in the interviews and focus groups, only 2 secured jobs or training programmes for which a degree was required<sup>25</sup>.

These students entered Liverpool Hope in 2000 – the year of the 'University of Greenwich' speech in which the role of higher education in the 'knowledge economy' was underlined (D.f.E.E., 2000). The students graduated in 2003, the year in which the higher education *White Paper* (DFES, 2003) argued:

'Graduates derive substantial benefits from having gained a degree, including wider career opportunities and the financial benefits that generally follow. On average, those with a higher education qualification earn around 50% more than non-graduates'. (D.f.E.S., 2003, 7.21, p.83)

---

<sup>25</sup> In both cases, the students had enrolled on PGCE programmes.



**This study found that widening participation students do indeed derive 'substantial benefits' from higher education. In the tracer interviews, all were highly positive about the experience of being a student, and looked back on their achievements with pride. For most students, obtaining a degree represented a key milestone, one that had an important bearing on self-confidence and self-identity. Becoming a graduate represented for almost all of those involved in the study an important social and cultural 'repositioning' (Harre and Langenhove, 1999).**

**Access to 'wider career opportunities' and 'financial benefits' were, however, less apparent. It may indeed be true that graduates, over the course of a working lifetime, earn 50 per cent more than non-graduates do. However, at the time of the tracer interviews, no reliable evidence was available to corroborate this. It may be too that there is stratification between students at different higher education institutions, with these students operating in different labour markets to younger, more mobile students and those based in higher prestige institutions such as the 'Russell Group' universities.**

## **Implications**

**The study offers a range of implications for careers services, Liverpool Hope and the sector as a whole. This section will attempt, briefly, to focus on these.**

### ***Implications for careers services***

**Given the findings of the study, it is perhaps not difficult to understand why links between widening participation students and careers services remain under-developed, not just at Liverpool Hope, but across the sector as a whole (Rowley and Purcell, 2001). This study supports Watts' (1996c) claim that the paradigm of careers services in higher education – one informed primarily by 'cosmopolitan'**

assumptions (Gouldner, 1957) - has only limited currency among students from under-represented, backgrounds. Even the concept of 'career', with its association with 'conformist', fast-track employment orientations (Brown and Scase, 1994) would appear to require a wider review.

In revealing the narrow horizons for action, which underpin students' career orientations, the study has raised issues about the career orientations of the careers service itself. While discussing Brown and Scase's (1994) career orientation model with students, I became aware of the extent that the careers service (and careers service organisations such as AGCAS and *Graduate Prospects*) upheld primarily 'conformist' and, to a large extent, 'traditional bureaucratic' career orientations. Other orientations, in particular, 'flexible', and 'socially committed' remain under-represented in career literature. To an equal extent, new economic sectors such as 'social enterprise' are under-represented in careers literature – despite an increased profile within local communities. Traditionally, local opportunities receive lower priorities in careers services than do those from national organisations. During the academic year, 2002-03, for example, the careers service at Liverpool Hope advertised 12,944 job vacancies. Of these, just over 2 per cent were based in Merseyside or the North West (*Prospects*, 2004). Furthermore, almost one in four of the 12,944 were in the 'traditional bureaucratic' financial services sector.

The study thus raises important questions for careers services, particularly those located in institutions such as Liverpool Hope. Widening participation represents a significant challenge to the established paradigm of careers services, which, despite the increased diversity of the higher education sector remains focused on preparing students for 'fast track' careers. In light of the findings, below are several recommendations designed to enable careers services develop closer links with widening participation students:



#### **a) Local opportunity structures**

Widening participation students in this study were restricted to local job markets. Traditionally, careers services in higher education have had low quality relationships with local job markets. Forging links with local Job Centres, Chambers of Commerce, local government providers and voluntary agencies will provide access to new streams of vacancy sources suitable to widening opportunities students.

#### **b) Alternative career structures**

To progress beyond the promulgation of 'conformist' models of work and employment, links with new economic sectors such as those represented by the voluntary and social enterprise sectors, will need to be developed by careers services. Locally, organisations such as the *Merseyside Social Economic Initiative* provide an interface between higher education and social enterprises (MSEI, 2004). Careers services must also acknowledge such fundamental and ongoing changes, which have taken place in graduate employment markets (Watts, 1996b).

#### **c) Integration into academic curricula**

The benefits of integrating careers service provision into academic curricula have been widely documented (Watts and Kidd, 1978, Watts, 1997b, Watts, 1996c). Widening participation students are less likely than others to make use of centralised student support services. Support services must therefore seek to work with academic subjects to integrate career management skills into the core curricula.

#### **d) Flexible support services**

Widening participation students are likely to require more flexible support services than those available to 'traditional students'. Electronic sources of career guidance – delivered for example via the

Internet (see for example: Offer and Madahar, 2004, Offer et al., 2001) – could provide more effective services to students with families and full-time jobs.

### *Implications for Liverpool Hope*

The study represents the first in-depth research project at Liverpool Hope University College to explore the career aspirations and employment patterns of a group of widening participation students. It is also among the first to have traced a group of students during the transition from higher education to employment. From the study, several issues bearing relevance to Liverpool Hope have emerged. Of these, arguably the most important relates to the quality of the student experience.

The study suggests that while academically, Liverpool Hope provides an effective academic learning environment for widening participation students, without extra support, such students are likely to remain marginalized and isolated within the wider 'field' of higher education. Wider patterns of engagement with Higher Education among this group were minimal. For some, after three years at Liverpool Hope, the only extracurricular activity in which they participated was their graduation ceremony. Consequently, the following points are recommended for consideration:

#### **a) Preparation prior to enrolment**

Entry into higher education can be a daunting experience, particularly for students whose families and social groups have limited prior experience of going to university. Scope exists for liaising with local access providers to improve the induction and careers preparation of widening participation students before enrolling at college.



## **b) Extracurricular activities**

The study revealed that widening participation students were on the whole willing to become engaged in extracurricular activities but, for a range of reasons, perceived those available as unsuitable. Widening participation students, with their focus on academic attainment, are likely to place added emphasis on extracurricular activities, which combine study support with social interaction. A particular challenge in this respect faces the Students' Union.

## **c) Mentoring role models**

One of the key challenges facing widening participation students is the absence of role models. Mentoring offers a powerful resource for students from non-traditional backgrounds to develop contacts, skills and insights. Mentors can be drawn from a range of backgrounds – employers, tutors, other students, etc. Similarly, work-based learning can provide widening participation students with important insights into different types of employment and careers.

## ***Implications for the sector***

The experiences of these widening participation students illustrate, I believe, some of the challenges facing higher education as it adjusts to mass-market provision. In recent years, the experience of institutions such as Liverpool Hope has indicated that while recruiting widening participation students is one thing, retaining them is another. While mature students over the age of 21 make up around a third of full-time undergraduates, they remain twice as likely to drop out of degree courses than younger students (HEFCE, 2003). At the same time, despite rapid expansion the proportion of students enrolling from the lowest three socio-economic groups remains static at 26 per cent (Goddard, 2003). With issues of retention now dominating the political agenda, there is perhaps a danger of assuming that the drive for access, widening participation and lifelong learning has been

achieved. As Thomas (2002) has argued, shifting the focus to retention seems to 'imply that a new and diverse constituency of learners are now present and all that needs to be done is to keep them, literally, on course'.

Yet, the extent that these widening participation students have failed to engage with the social and cultural aspects of university may come as a surprise within the sector, even though broadly similar findings have been made by others (for example, Britton and Baxter, 2001, Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, Read et al., 2003). If higher education is to be expanded, and access widened to include a more equitable cross-section of society, it seems unavoidable that changes will need to be made in student support and student funding. Furthermore, the employment destinations of the students and their lack of engagement with 'traditional' graduate markets raises further questions in relation to graduate employability, graduate earnings, and the economically instrumentalist way that higher education is marketed.

### **Limitations of the research**

The research is subject to various limitations. The economic context of Merseyside is likely to be different from other UK regions. This in turn, is likely to have had an impact on students' aspirations and experiences. To some extent, Liverpool Hope may also be somewhat atypical across the sector in terms of its size, historical positioning and staff-student ratios. As discussed in Chapter 1, above average numbers of Hope students are from lower social groups. Within this context, widening participation students are therefore not as isolated as they might be in other, more socially affluent institutions.



## **Desirable future research**

From this study, a number of issues and questions have emerged which would benefit from further research. These include the following:

### **a) Longitudinal studies**

To explore the long-term employment of widening participation students it would be beneficial to trace the 28 students at intervals of three, five and seven years after graduation. In this, the research could offer an interesting contrast with the large scale quantitative studies undertaken by (among others) Elias and Purcell (2004).

### **b) Revised Brown and Scase typology**

This study proposes a revised model based on Brown and Scase's research (1994). Although this model resonated with the students at Liverpool Hope, further research is required with a wider range of students, in order to assess its validity.

### **c) Locals and Cosmopolitans**

Watts (1996) argued that careers services in higher education adhered to a largely 'cosmopolitan' paradigm that was inappropriate when applied to widening participation students. Gouldner's (1957) 'cosmopolitan and locals' model has been updated by Kanter (1995), yet within careers work remains largely untested. A study exploring the experiences of 'local' students within 'cosmopolitan' job markets, or HE institutions could potentially offer additional insights into graduate employment markets.

#### **d) Widening participation students from other entry routes**

In recent years, the Government has prioritised the recruitment of younger students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Such students have different educational biographies from those in this study (many will have entered with A levels as opposed to access studies), yet in many ways, face similar barriers. The experiences, aspirations and employment of these students would provide a valuable contribution to the literature.

#### **Personal reflections of the research process**

Working in higher education, the study has provided me with a greater insight into the experiences and aspirations of widening participation students. The extent that certain groups of students are disengaged with - and by - higher education came as a shock to me, while also explaining why so few widening participation students attended 'extracurricular' events such as career presentations and employer seminars.

Like West (1996), I found many of the students' personal accounts of childhood, family life, schooling and personal relationships highly moving. Academic concepts such as 'turning points' and 'horizons for action' acquire added poignancy when discussed in the context of domestic violence, or disintegrating families. Having an opportunity to see the college, or the careers service, or even my colleagues and myself through the eyes of students could be a revealing, and at times uncomfortable experience. In the course of the interviews and focus groups it was impossible (despite my initial attempts) to avoid engaging in a certain amount of self-disclosure. While on reflection I feel this established a sense of mutual trust, it also served to 'reposition' the relationship between the students and myself. Despite somewhat different educational backgrounds, the research reminded me that I had much in common with the group (similar age, growing up in Merseyside, trying to juggle the demands of work and home,



etc). We were also fellow students – an observation that led, inevitably, to discussions on the pros and cons of postgraduate study.

As the study unfolded, I found that I was able to engage more confidently with the work of Bourdieu – particularly in terms of the conceptual framework. The concept of cultural capital has interested me from a careers perspective; this study provided an opportunity for exploring cultural capital within a broader framework of students' lives.

From a professional perspective, the study has led me to re-evaluate the positioning of the careers service at Liverpool Hope – particularly in terms of how it markets itself to 'non-traditional' students. Local opportunities, in addition to those advertised by national organisations, are being developed, as are links with local social enterprise firms<sup>26</sup>.

### **Final summary: Outcasts on the Inside?**

This study began with a quotation by Pierre Bourdieu (1999) in which working-class students in higher education were described as 'outcasts on the inside'. As 'outcasts,' Bourdieu claimed such students engage in a 'balancing act' consisting of

'enraptured adherence to the illusions the system proposes and resignation to its decrees, between anxious submission and powerless revolt' (Bourdieu, 1999).

To some extent, the widening participation students in this study reflected different types of 'outcasts' – outcasts from previous education institutions, outcasts from key employment markets, outcasts from jobs and training programmes. Enrolment in higher education was, for them, an attempt at self-repositioning through the acquisition of educational capital. In this, they were encouraged by

the combined rhetoric of widening participation and the knowledge economy.

Once enrolled, many of the students – through a combination of social, structural and economic factors – retained the status of ‘outcasts on the inside’. As Ball noted in a similar study (Ball et al., 2002), overcoming and transforming a negative educational habitus could be problematic, particularly if a student is disengaged from the wider social and cultural aspects of higher education. Without this, patterns of engagement tended to be one-dimensional and informed by ‘local’ horizons for action. With little contact with the careers service, students’ career aspirations remained largely self-fulfilling and confirmatory – as demonstrated by their employment destinations at the time of the tracer interviews.

The tracer interviews also revealed however, that the experience of higher education was for most students highly significant in terms of self-confidence and the construction of new personal identities. Yet while these new identities could be uplifting and positive, they could also be fragile, suggesting that cultural capital gained from higher education was open to constant negotiation and arbitration.

---

<sup>26</sup> In 2004, the careers service secured funding from the European Union to run a two-year project building links with social enterprise firms in Merseyside.



# Appendices

## **Appendix 1: Interview Questionnaire**

### **1. Being a final-year student**

- a) What does it feel like to be almost at the end of your degree course?
- b) Is being a final-year student very different from being a first or second year? How? Why?
- c) What's kept you going?
- d) What are your priorities for this year? What are the things that are most important to you?
- e) What sort of services do you make use of at College – counselling, careers, accommodation etc – have you always used these services or have things changed over the years?
- f) What sort of support have you received at Hope? Has it been enough, aimed at the right level etc?
- g) Looking back, what would you say have been the significant events that have perhaps shaped your time here? What have been the 'critical incidents' for you?
- h) Who have been the people who have had the most impact on you – good or bad?
- i) In social terms, have your relationships with other students changed while you've been here?
- j) What sort of student are you? Studious / conscientious / quiet / sociable?
- k) What's more important: studying hard in your final year to get a good degree and then applying for jobs; or focusing on applying for jobs early in the year before studying for your degree?
- l) Has being an undergraduate been as you expected?
- m) If you had your time again, what would you do differently?

### **2. If you are employed:**

- a) Are you currently working (what is your employment)? Has your job changed during your time in HE? (Promotion / redeployment / upgrading, etc.)
- b) What has been your employer's response while you have been studying?
- c) How have others in your workplace responded to you? Has this response changed?

### **3. Your previous education and work experience**

- a) What were your previous experiences of education (school, sixth form etc)?
- b) What did you do after leaving school?
- c) What did you do prior to entering HE? (Access? A levels?)



- d) While doing your Access course (if applicable) what was it like being a student again?
- e) What made you want to enter higher education? (And why didn't you do it when you were 18?)

#### **4. Study and home**

- a) When you were growing up, what sort of expectations did your family have for you in terms of education / work?
- b) Had anyone in your family / peer group gone to HE before? What were their responses when you enrolled?
- c) What sort of jobs did your family / friends / community work in?
- d) Might your family say you have changed during the time that you've been at Hope? If so, how? Are you a different person?
- e) How did your family / friends / community react when you told them you were going to go to university? Have their views changed over time?
- f) Have others in your family been to university before?
- g) What will your degree mean to your family?
- h) Has your time in higher education changed the way you live – leisure time, reading habits, social activities etc?
- i) Do you participate in non-curricula activities and events at the college? Have these impacted on your home life?

#### **5. Career aspirations**

- a) What will you do after you graduate? Describe it.
- b) How important were job prospects to you when you were thinking about enrolling in higher education?
- c) What's more important: getting the job you want; or getting the degree classification you want?
- d) What factors will you have to take into consideration when choosing your job? – Family? Pay? Location? Prospects? Hours of work?
- e) How do you see the opportunities available to you? How would you describe the graduate recruitment market – buoyant, competitive?
- f) If you hadn't entered higher education, what sort of life do you think you would be having now?
- g) Do you have a 'career role model' – someone that you look to as an example?
- h) Has your thinking about jobs changed during the time that you have been at Hope?
- i) As a final-year student, what can Career Development do to help you the most in your career planning?
- j) When we meet again in a year's time, describe to me what you'll be doing.



## Appendix 2: Student Survey Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaire is to help Career Development provide the best possible service for Hope students. All responses will be dealt with in the strictest of confidence. No names will be used in the final report.

<u>Name</u> (optional):	<u>Gender:</u> M / F
<u>Subject(s) studied</u>	<u>Year of study:</u>

1) Age: please tick one of the boxes below:

18 - 21	22 – 25	26 – 30	31 – 35	36 – 40	41 +
---------	---------	---------	---------	---------	------

2) Status: single, married, cohabiting, divorced etc .....

No. of dependents: Are you the main breadwinner? Yes / No

3) What is the highest education qualification that you currently hold? Please tick the relevant box below.

CSE	GCSE	BTEC ND	HNC / H ND	Degree	Work-related qualification
O Level	A level	Access	Cert. H.E.	City & Guilds	Other?

4) Your family: What were your parents' highest educational qualifications? Please tick the relevant box:

Mother					
None	O levels / CSE	A levels	Degree	Higher degree	Other qualifications

Father					
None	O levels / CSE	A levels	Degree	Higher degree	Other qualifications

5) Who is the person or persons who has had the most influence on your education until now? Who are they, and why have they been so important?



6) Thinking back to when you came to Hope, what were the main reasons for you enrolling? Rank some or all of the following in terms of how significant they were to you when you enrolled. (1 = most important).

I wanted to improve my earning potential		Because it will help me achieve my career goals	
It was for job related reasons		Because it will help me in the job I already do	
It was for personal reasons		Because it was expected of me by friends or family, teachers, etc.	
It was something that I always intended to do		There were few other options	
It was what most of my friends were doing		Wasn't really something I gave much thought to	
It was to postpone having to go to work		To escape a dead-end job	
For other reasons:		My employer offered to support me (financially or with time off work)	
Were there any other reasons that were important to you? If so, please add them below:			

7) Now that you are several years into your studies at Hope, has the importance of any of the factors above changed? What would you say are the factors that are most important to you NOW?

I want to improve my earning potential		Because it will help me achieve my career goals	
It is for job related reasons		Because it will help me in the job I already do	
It is for personal reasons		Because it is expected of me by friends or family, teachers, etc.	
It is something that I always intended to do		There are few other options	
It is what most of my friends are doing		Not something I have given much thought to	
It is to postpone having to go to work		To escape a dead-end job	
For other reasons:		My employer is supporting me (financially or with time off work)	
Again, are there any other factors that were important to you? Please add them below:			



8) If you have a job while you are studying, what do you do? Who do you work for and what is your job title?

9) How many hours do you work each week? Please circle

10 – 20	21 – 30	31 – 40	41 +
---------	---------	---------	------

10) Has your experience of work so far influenced your ideas about the sort of work you want to do in the future? [Yes / No]

If ‘Yes’, how?

11) Which of the following statements most closely reflect your views about your future? Please prioritise as many factors as you want to select in rank order (1 = most important).

My career is very important to me; pursuing and being successful in an organisation is something that I am very committed to	
I would rather work with one organisation than change jobs frequently	
I'm very aware of how work is changing and am prepared, in the future, to have to change jobs regularly when the time is right	
Given the choice, I would rather be self-employed, working for myself rather than for an organisation	
For me, my career always comes second to my interests or my other commitments; a job's just a job	
If I could, I wouldn't work at all. Instead I would prefer to pursue an alternative lifestyle free from materialism and capitalist values of 'work' and 'careers'	
I work solely for the income it brings. I don't expect to feel fulfilled in a career – I get this from my personal interests	
I have very clear social and/or ethical values to which I am committed. Ideally I would like a job that enabled me to combine my interests with my work.	
Ideally, I would like a job that enabled me to combine my interests with my work	

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Please return to Paul Redmond, Career Development, Liverpool Hope University College, Hope Park, Liverpool, L16 9JD.



## **Appendix 3: Tracer Questionnaire**

### **Personal information**

- Recap to me what's happened to you since leaving Hope: what employment have you had / do you have now? Have you taken part in any extra training or study?
- In general, have there been any important changes to your plans or ambitions? Why?
- Have your personal circumstances changed in any way?

### **Earnings and job information**

- What do you think about the job that you are now doing? Is it what you would have expected to be doing when you were in college (and before)?
- Looking back, what would you say were the main skills that you gained from higher education? Do you use these skills in your day-to-day job?
- Has your attitude to work, jobs, wages and promotion changed at all? Do you do your job differently because you are a graduate?
- Would you consider what you are doing now to be a 'graduate job'? Does this word mean anything to you? In your experience, what are 'graduate' jobs?
- Since leaving college, what sort of things have you been looking for in a job? Has your attitude towards jobs and careers changed do you think in the last three years?
- It's claimed that average salaries for graduates in the North West are around £16,500. How does this compare to your earnings since leaving Hope?
- Now that you have a degree, would you say your earning potential has increased?
- What's the job market like for graduates? What do you think you would need to do to improve your career prospects?
- How have employers responded to the fact that you have a degree? Do you think you are treated differently or the same? Does being a graduate make any difference when you apply for jobs?

### **Positioning**

- Do you feel you are a different person now you are a graduate? Why? Do others share this view? Have your views or ways of doing things changed?
- How does being a graduate from Liverpool Hope position you in the job market? Are you conscious that employers perceive graduates from different universities in different ways?
- Do you tell employers you have a degree from Liverpool Hope or a degree from Liverpool University<sup>27</sup>? Why? Has this always been the case? Can you think of a time when this might not be the case?
- It's claimed that graduates leaving HE experience similar feelings or concerns: uncertainty; inflated expectations; the 'work experience' paradox; and the 'low time' (Perrone & Vickers, 2003). Can you identify with this in any way?
- How would you describe your current position? Has your position against any of these themes changed over time? If so, why?
- Reading the transcript from our first meeting, do you think your 'position' has changed on any of the things we talked about? If so, why?
- Reading the transcript, what comes across to you? What might the differences be if we compared it with the transcript from this interview?
- Have things since leaving Hope happened in the way that you thought they would happen?
- Do you think that you have changed – in the way that you think or in the way you behave? Why?

---

<sup>27</sup> Hope graduates are awarded degrees from the University of Liverpool. This arrangement continues to raise interesting questions about what sort of information students should disclose to potential employers.

## **Appendix 4: Summary of Questionnaire Data**

Approximately 150 Liverpool Hope students completed the questionnaire during January 2002. Appendix 4 provides a summary of data collated from the questionnaire.

### **1) Personal data**

In total, 67 fully completed questionnaires were returned. Women accounted for 55 out of 67, or 82 per cent, of all respondents.

The composition of the sample was evenly divided between students entering Liverpool Hope via widening participation routes, and those entering via 'traditional' routes such as A levels and BTEC/GNVQ. Widening participation students accounted for 33 of the 67 (49%). Of these, the majority had enrolled via Reach Out access programmes.

In age terms, 27 of the 67 (40%) students were 26 years or over. A further 21 were aged between 18 and 21, and 19 were aged between 22 and 25 (28%).

Table 1: Summary of respondents by age

Age	Number of students	Percentage
18 – 21	21	31
22 – 25	19	28
26 – 30	9	14
31 – 35	2	3
36 – 40	8	12
41 +	8	12
Total	67	100

More than half of those responding (38 out of 67) had children. Students from widening participation backgrounds were more likely to have children than those from 'traditional' backgrounds. Just 4 of the 28 widening participation students were without children, compared to 29 of the 39 students from 'traditional' routes. This is likely to reflect the age profile of the widening participation students.



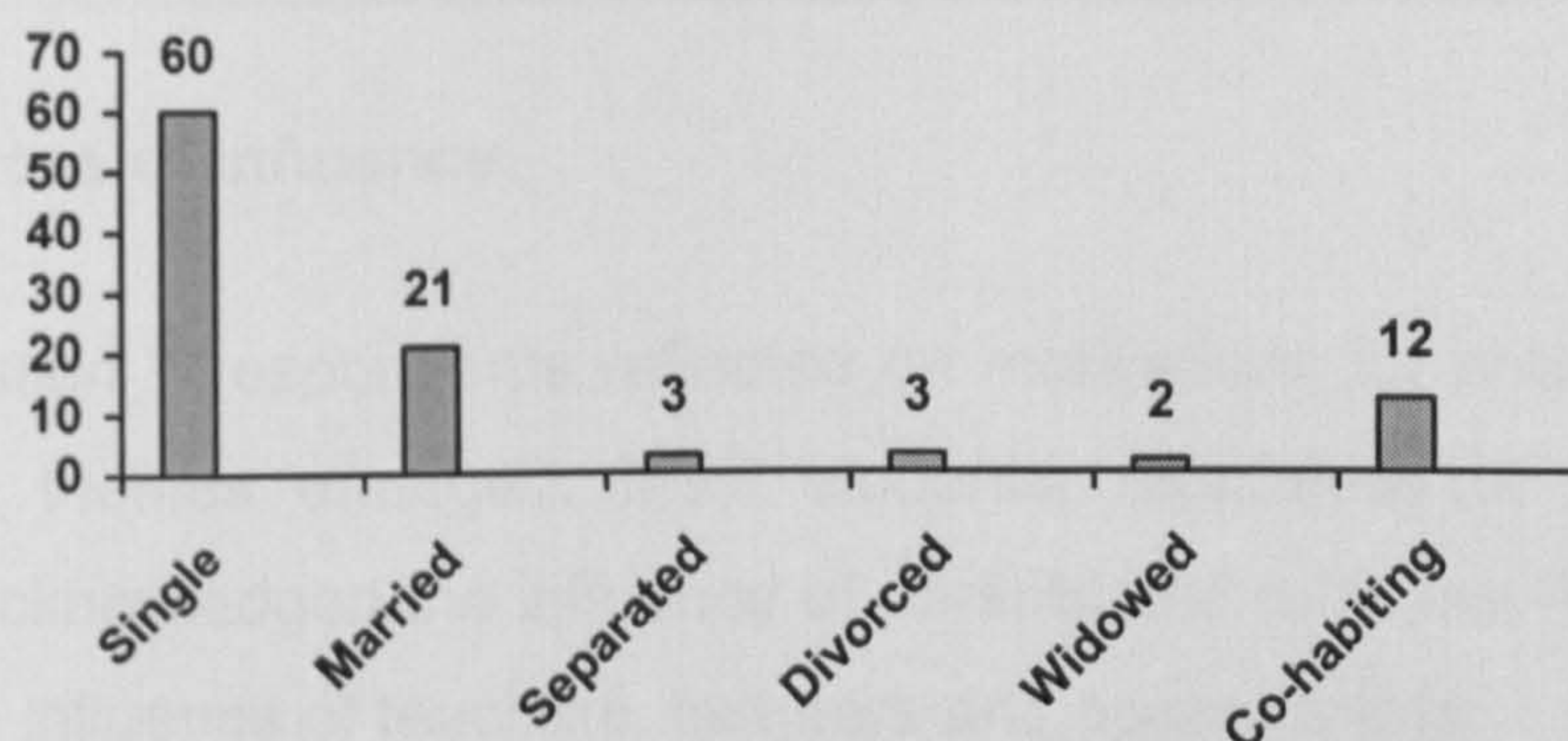
### 1.1. Subject disciplines

Respondents were from a cross section of academic disciplines. However, of these, 45 (67%) were from social sciences. This prevalence is likely to reflect 'environmental' factors linked to how and when the questionnaire was administered.

### 2) Status

Six out of ten respondents reported their personal status as 'single'. Fourteen (21%) were married. Eight (12%) were cohabiting, two (3%) were divorced, two 'separated' and one was widowed (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Personal status (by percentage)



### 3) Levels of parental education

Respondents were asked to indicate the highest levels of educational attainment achieved by their parents. From this, evidence emerged to suggest that parents of widening participation students were less likely to have qualifications than those of students from 'traditional' backgrounds. This differential was particularly marked with students' mothers. Students from 'traditional' entry routes were more likely to have mothers with first degrees. Any inference drawn from this must, however remain cautious. The data also suggests that parents of students from widening participation backgrounds were just as likely to possess higher degrees or vocational qualifications (see Table 3).



Table 3 Levels of parental educational attainment

N = 67	None	O levels	A levels	Degree	Higher Degrees	Other
<b>MOTHERS</b>						
WP	16	7	0	0	2	2
Trad. entry	4	18	3	8	1	4
All	20	25	3	8	3	6
<b>FATHERS</b>						
WP	12	3	0	1	3	7
Trad. entry	5	14	1	9	3	5
All	17	17	1	10	6	12
<b>MOTHERS &amp; FATHERS</b>						
WP	28	10	0	1	5	9
Trad. entry	9	32	4	17	4	9
All	37	42	4	18	9	18

4) Sources of influence

In *Question 7* respondents reflected on motivations for entering HE. Several themes emerged. Most students, regardless of mode of entry, acknowledged the influence of parents and relatives. Also cited was the influence of teachers, lecturers and access tutors:

'My father, throughout my childhood stressed the benefits to be had by 'questioning' everything until I understood it and to enjoy learning. There is so much to learn and so little time in which to learn it!' (6: Female aged 26-30)<sup>28</sup>

'Access tutor – made me realise my own potential, encouraged me through her own example' (8: Female, aged 26 – 30)

'English teacher (secondary level) he acknowledged my verbal skills early on my educational career and recognised I had a brain. He gave me individual homework challenges using my interests'  
(52, Female, 36-40)

<sup>28</sup> When used, text supplied by students has been annotated with the number of the questionnaire followed by the student's gender and age.



**'Friends mostly, and some family members who have studied themselves: when I was a classroom assistant the young teacher I supported inspired me to go on an Access course with the intention of teaching (she has had the most influence on me' (13: Female aged 41+)**

**'Parents: supportive and wanting me to achieve more!'  
(21: Female aged 18-21)**

**As parents, widening participation students were keen to stress the importance of 'setting a good example'. This theme was evident in a number of questionnaires.**

**'My son ... it's important to show him that he is also capable of entering into H.E. and that is the natural process to follow from school' (3: Female, aged 22-25)**

**'My children, and the need to support them' (51: Female, aged 31-35)**

**For some respondents, the key source of motivation derived from personal aspirations:**

**'No one – my family are working class and education was not seen as an important factor in my life. Added to that, as I am female, I was and still am to (an) extent expected to carry on the role of a mother and a housewife ... ' (5: Female, aged 41+)**

**Some evidence exists to suggest that male respondents were more likely to conceptualize higher education in terms of job or career-related benefits. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to emphasize the potential for accruing personal or family-related benefits. Some male respondents claimed that entry into higher education had been due to the intervention of their employer. Others stressed the perceived link between HE and increased earnings.**

**5) Reasons for enrolling**

*Question 8* required respondents to reflect on personal motivations for enrolling. Provided, was a set of statements for respondents to rank in order of preference. Table 5 provides a summary of these responses.

**Table 5 Reasons for enrolling: summary of responses**

<i>Ranking</i>	<i>Reason</i>
1.	To improve my earning potential
2.	Because it will help me achieve my career goals
3.	It was for job related reasons
4.	It was something that I always intended to do
5.	It was for personal reasons
6.	Because it will help me in the job I already do
7.	Wasn't really something I gave much thought to
8.	There were few other options
9.	To escape a dead-end job
10.	It was to postpone having to go to work
11.	My employer offered to support me (financially or with time off work)
12.	For other reasons
13.	It was what most of my friends were doing
14.	Because it was expected of me by family, friends, teachers etc.

For all students – widening participation and traditional entry – job and career-related reasons were prioritized above all other factors such as 'following the example of friends' (13<sup>th</sup>) or living up to the expectations of family and 'significant others' (14<sup>th</sup>). According to the questionnaire, vocational factors, not personal issues predominate.

**6) Reasons for enrolling – three years on**

In *Question 9* students were required to consider if, several years into their degree studies, the importance (i.e. the ranking) of any of these factors had changed. Table 6 offers a summary of these revised priorities.



**Table 6. Reasons for enrolling – revised priorities**

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Previous Ranking</b>	<b>Reason</b>
1.	4.	It was something that I always intended to do
2.	1.	I wanted to improve my earning potential
3.	5.	It was for personal reasons
4.	2.	Because it will help me achieve my career goals
5.	3.	It was for job related reasons
6.	8.	There were few other options
7.	14.	Because it was expected of me by friends or family, teachers, etc.
8.	7.	Wasn't really something I gave much thought to
9.	13.	It was what most of my friends were doing
10.	12.	For other reasons
11.	11.	My employer offered to support me (financially or with time off work)
12.	9.	To escape a dead-end job
13.	6.	Because it will help me in the job I already do
14.	10.	It was to postpone having to go to work

Asked to review their motivations for enrolling in higher education a similar pattern emerged, with most respondents maintaining that participation in higher education was driven primarily by job or earning-related considerations. The main difference was that several years later the top reason has shifted from *'To improve my earning potential'* (subsequently ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>) to, *'It was something that I had always intended to do'* (initially ranked 4<sup>th</sup>).

It is not clear why this (admittedly slight) change should have taken place, until respondents' accompanying comments are considered. In these, several respondents appeared to suggest that higher education had led to a 're-positioning' of self-identities – both as learners and in some cases, as adults:

*'I have gained my own identity back. I now don't feel that I am just an extension of my own husband and children – I am my own person again although given the same set of circumstances I am not sure that I would do it again. There has been an enormous amount of pressure on me – particularly financial – and that will still be there when I have completed my studies'* (5: Female, aged 41+)

Interpreting the scores must however be treated with caution because in several cases scoring was irregular (several respondents ignored the 1-5 key and entered higher values, which in turn had to be re-worked into the tables).

**7) Jobs while studying**

The number of hours spent by respondents in employment was surprising, given that all but four were full-time students (see Table 8). From this, 49 of the 67 (73%) were employed in some form of term-time employment. Seventeen worked for between 10 and 20 hours per week; 16 worked for between 21 and 30 hours; 10 for between 31 and 40 hours; and 6 students (only two of whom were enrolled on a part-time basis) spent more than 41 hours per week in employment. In total, 18 of the 67 (27%) had no reported employment.

Table 7. Hours worked by respondents (per week)

N = 67

<i>Hours worked per week</i>	<i>Numbers recorded</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
No employment	18	27
10 – 20	17	25
21 – 30	16	24
31 – 40	10	15
41 +	6	9
Total	67	100

Respondents worked in a broad range of occupational sectors, ranging from social services to mechanical engineering. The largest single category was nursery nursing and care. Also represented were jobs in retail, hospitality and call centres.

The impact of term-time working on future career aspirations and perceptions could be considerable. For some, part-time employment seemed to confirm a sense of jobs and occupations that were acceptable, and which were not:

- 'I hated the job I had at (...) and wanted to get out and do something with my career' (4: Male, aged 36 – 40).
- 'I never want to work in a call centre again!' (8: Female aged 26-30)



**'I do not want to stay in a sales related role for all my career, as the stress is too great' (18: Male, aged 36-40).**

**'I don't want to work in an office' (23: Female, aged 18-21)**

**'It's made me realise I do want to work well and not work there for any longer than I have to' (39: Female aged 18-21).**

**'I would like to be in management, as I would prefer to be in charge than be ordered about' (43: Female, aged 22-25).**

**For others, part-time employment had provided insights and possible access to new career opportunities:**

**'It has highlighted certain areas I don't want to work, and supported my ideas of the fields in which I want to work' (24: Female, 22-25).**

**'If I never came to Hope I would never have discovered the sense of achievement of working in a voluntary capacity that I feel today' (5: Female: 41+).**

**When collated, comments in relation to part-time employment suggests awareness of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate 'graduate' employment. Also emerging is a sense that the jobs in which students will work after graduation will be inherently different – both in status and function – from those in which they are currently employed. As one respondent stated: 'I want a career and not menial jobs' (3: Female, aged 22-25).**

**This response is consistent with responses to Question 9, in which students prioritised the factors, which led them to enrol in higher education. It also suggests that the desire to secure improved employment opportunities continues throughout students' degree programmes.**

8) Career 'ideal types' profile

Question 13 asked respondents to consider 8 statements, each relating to an 'ideal type' developed by Brown and Scase (1994). Each had to be ranked in order of priority. Combined rankings from all questionnaires were collated and tabulated (Table 8).

Table 8. Career 'ideal' type categories (Source: Brown and Scase, 1994)

Rank	CONFORMISTS	Rank	NON CONFORMISTS
1 <sup>st</sup>	Conformist: My career is very important to me; pursuing and being successful in an organisation is something that I am very committed to	6 <sup>th</sup>	Non-Conformist: For me, my career always comes second to my interests or my other commitments; a job's just a job
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Traditional Bureaucratic: I would rather work with one organisation than change jobs frequently	7 <sup>th</sup>	Drop Out: If I could, I wouldn't work at all. Instead I would prefer to pursue an alternative lifestyle free from materialism and capitalist values of 'work' and 'careers'
5 <sup>th</sup>	Flexible: I'm very aware of how work is changing and am prepared, in the future, to have to change jobs regularly when the time is right	8 <sup>th</sup>	Ritualist: I work solely for the income it brings. I don't expect to feel fulfilled in a career – I get this from my personal interests
4 <sup>th</sup>	Entrepreneurial: Given the choice, I would rather be self-employed, working for myself rather than for an organisation	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Socially Committed: I have very clear social and/or ethical values to which I am committed. Ideally I would like a job that enabled me to combine my interests with my work.

Data obtained from this question is particularly rich and suggests a number of issues:

8.1. Combined responses

When data from all responses was collated it was found that on the whole students displayed a preference for 'conformist' career patterns – particularly those involving 'traditional bureaucratic' careers within large organisations. There was, however, one exception. The third



highest preference was for the 'non-conformist' 'socially committed' ideal type. This aside, respondents displayed a strong preference for 'conformist' career patterns. Conversely, non-conformist orientations such as 'drop out' and 'ritualist' motivated comparatively few. Such responses suggest that 'conformist' orientations motivated students in the sample.

### 8.2. Traditional entry

Responses from students from 'traditional' and widening participation entry routes, when disaggregated, produced slightly different profiles. Students from 'traditional' entry routes revealed a preference for 'conformist' career patterns, and less of an adherence to 'socially committed' orientations (Table 8.2). Instead, these students were more likely to be motivated by 'flexible' work models – working in different roles or 'portfolios' within organisations.

Table 8.2. Career 'ideal' type categories: Traditional Entry (Source: Brown and Scase, 1994)

Rank	CONFORMISTS	Rank	NON CONFORMISTS
1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Conformist:</b> My career is very important to me; pursuing and being successful in an organisation is something that I am very committed to	7 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Non-Conformist:</b> For me, my career always comes second to my interests or my other commitments; a job's just a job
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<b>Traditional Bureaucratic:</b> I would rather work with one organisation than change jobs frequently	6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Drop Out:</b> If I could, I wouldn't work at all. Instead I would prefer to pursue an alternative lifestyle free from materialism and capitalist values of 'work' and 'careers'
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>Flexible:</b> I'm very aware of how work is changing and am prepared, in the future, to have to change jobs regularly when the time is right	8 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Ritualist:</b> I work solely for the income it brings; I don't expect to feel fulfilled in a career – I get this from my personal interests
5 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Entrepreneurial:</b> Given the choice, I would rather be self-employed, working for myself rather than for an organisation	4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Socially Committed:</b> I have very clear social and/or ethical values to which I am committed. Ideally I would like a job that enabled me to combine my interests with my work.

### 8.3. Widening participation

Respondents from widening participation routes revealed a slight preference for 'non-conformist' career patterns (Table 4.7), yet it is

likely that this preference was boosted by the numbers of widening participation students prioritising 'socially committed' careers (among this group, socially committed careers were the top priority).

Table 8.3. Career 'ideal' type categories: Widening Participation (Brown and Scafe, 1994)

Rank	CONFORMISTS	Rank	NON CONFORMISTS
4 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Conformist</i> : My career is very important to me; pursuing and being successful in an organisation is something that I am very committed to	3 <sup>rd</sup>	<i>Non-Conformist</i> : For me, my career always comes second to my interests or my other commitments; a job's just a job
6 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Traditional/Bureaucratic</i> : I would rather work with one organisation than change jobs frequently	7 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Drop Out</i> : If I could, I wouldn't work at all. Instead I would prefer to pursue an alternative lifestyle free from materialism and capitalist values of 'work' and 'careers'
5 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Flexible</i> : I'm very aware of how work is changing and am prepared, in the future, to have to change jobs regularly when the time is right	8 <sup>th</sup>	<i>Ritualist</i> : I work solely for the income it brings. I don't expect to feel fulfilled in a career – I get this from my personal interests
2 <sup>nd</sup>	<i>Entrepreneurial</i> : Given the choice, I would rather be self-employed, working for myself rather than for an organisation	1 <sup>st</sup>	<i>Socially Committed</i> : I have very clear social and/or ethical values to which I am committed. Ideally I would like a job that enabled me to combine my interests with my work.

Unlike traditional entry students, students from widening participation routes were more likely to be motivated by 'entrepreneurial' career models. It does suggest however that widening participation students are more likely to be motivated by non-conformist ways of working, and willing to consider less traditional options.



## **Appendix 5: Focus Group Transcript**

**Date:** 8 October 2002  
**Time:** 1.00 – 2.30 pm  
**Venue:** Liverpool Hope  
**Participants:** 'Jill' (F9), 'Helen' (F17), 'Hayley' (F18), 'Davina' (F20),  
'Peter' (M5), 'Alison' (F8), 'Karen' (F19)  
**Facilitator:** Paul Redmond (PR)

- 1 (Jill) My name's Jill and I'm doing IT and Sociology
- 2 (Alison) I'm doing a combined degree in IT and Sociology
- 3 (Davina) I'm Davina and I'm repeating what them two have just said – I'm doing a
- 4 combined degree in IT and Sociology
- 5 (Karen) I'm Karen, I'm doing a combined degree in Sport and Psychology though in
- 6 my final year I'm majoring in Psychology.
- 7 (Helen) Helen, same as Hayley – English and IT.
- 8 (PR) Thanks for that. Can I just say, in terms of an introduction, this is just an hour
- 9 focus group; it's your chance to say what you think, what matters to you, it's totally
- 10 confidential so the fact that I'm taping it is just so I can write it up and you'll each get
- 11 a copy of the transcript, so I'll be interested to see what you think of it. What I'm
- 12 going to be focusing on are basically three areas: what's it like to be a final year
- 13 student; what's study been like in terms of home life ...
- 14 (Hayley) Let's get this straight, the degree is a piece of cake; it's the organising of
- 15 the family and the house is the main thing ...
- 16 (PR) Right, so let's hear about that ... and lastly, career aspirations – what your
- 17 career aspirations are. So I've just got a few questions and you can just talk ...
- 18 (Helen) If you can get a word in!
- 19 (PR) Yes, we want to make sure we get everyone's views. OK, so you're all in your
- 20 final year now? What's it feel like to be a final-year student?
- 21 (Helen) Frightening! Because when I first started back I thought 'Oh I just feel thick'
- 22 because all the work was being thrown at me but I thought I can't be thick because
- 23 I've got through my first two years but I just felt overwhelmed by the work.
- 24 (Hayley) I think what it is, you have this break in the summer holidays which is too
- 25 long a break, I'd prefer to work right through because you get kind of paced and
- 26 then you have this four months off when all you do is you're reading this text which
- 27 is relaxing in itself isn't it, the literature, then you get back and it's like straight back
- 28 into it and it's like overload so it takes you a few weeks to like settle down and get
- 29 back into that mode.
- 30 (Helen) I only feel calm now: the third week!
- 31 (Hayley) Well it takes a few weeks to settle in doesn't it.
- 32 (Helen) And I've had other factors that have affected me, like a chest infection and
- 33 it's right back in!

34 (Jill) I just found, I enjoyed my four months off. I had a horrendous year last year in  
35 terms of personal circumstances and I just managed to get through. But I did get  
36 through. I pulled my socks up and done well in the last semester. Chose ... before  
37 we got back I got a phone call from a tutor who advised me to do applied research  
38 which was something I didn't consider doing, so whereas I'd sort of paced myself in  
39 my head in terms of modules – structured modules – I found in the first two weeks I  
40 had to totally reorganise my university life as well as my home life.

41 (Karen) Can I just say something different about coming back? I don't know if  
42 anyone felt the same thing, but I just felt really sad about coming back, about being  
43 in the final year. I know it's really, really hard, but I've really enjoyed it, thinking 'God  
44 this is the final one'.

45 (Hayley) You're not doing a PGCE then?

46 (Karen) I don't think so. I know for certain what I'm going to do yet. When I started,  
47 back in college I did NVQ's first then the Access course, this seemed years and  
48 years away you know? And even though it's been really, really hard it's gone really,  
49 really quick. And it's like, God it's near the end now, you know?

50 (Helen) It does fly doesn't it?

51 (Karen) Even when you're in the middle of it though, it's like it's never ending.

52 (Jill) Don't you find though, when you first started - because I did Access – that this  
53 was not a reality to me. And now, six months down the line I've got it under my belt,  
54 don't you find that since you've been here your degree is just the first stage ...

55 (Helen) When you think it's your final stage but it's not, is it?

56 (Jill) It's your first stage training before specialising in your subject.

57 (PR) Does that dawn on you from the start or just as you go on?

58 (Helen) I don't think you really think about it do you? I think you just want to get on  
59 that degree and you get to your final year and you think oh I've got to work now and  
60 you do and it's only when you come to your final year and you realise what you're  
61 actually working for and you can actually carry on and go further because you  
62 wouldn't even contemplate something like that when you're doing your Access, you  
63 just think oh my God, that degree, I've got to pass that first. You're just blinkered  
64 aren't you?

65 (Karen) Even the idea of a degree ... certainly in my family because I'll be the first  
66 in my family

67 [Others] Same here!

68 (Karen) And my mum's seventy-six and she says so what are you going to be then,  
69 because she thinks it makes you something. I say, mum it's just a degree and she  
70 says, what does that mean? I go, it doesn't mean nothing dear because she doesn't  
71 understand that it's not part of her - it wasn't part of me either. I think it's a good  
72 thing that's made me want it for my kids now you know?

73 (Helen) I've just started saying 'uni' – I've been saying 'college' for two years ...it  
74 sounds strange saying 'uni'.



75 (Jill) Don't you find you say college because you don't want to blow your own  
76 trumpet?

77 (Davina) Depends on who I'm talking to which one I say!

78 (Jill) My daughter goes mad and she says to me, no you're at university mum. And I  
79 go I know that but when you're with people who are not from that environment you  
80 want to play yourself down.

81 (PR) Because it sounds a bit ... showy?

82 (Davina) Patronising, yes.

83 (Hayley) It doesn't for me. I just tell everybody – I don't care who!

84 *[Laughter]*

85 (PR – to P: who has just arrived) Would you like to introduce yourself to the group?

86 (Peter) My name's Peter. I'm on a final year now of a six-year Reach Out. I'm doing  
87 American Studies and Geography. I've finished all my American Studies and I was  
88 sad about that, but I'm not sad about finishing the six years.

89 (Hayley) Six years is a long time isn't it?

90 (Peter) It is, yes.

91 (Hayley) I could do it in three. *[Laughter]*

92 (Jill) I was going to start off doing it in six years and it was only a late intervention  
93 that made me do it full time and then finding that doors opened up for you which  
94 you wouldn't have known if you'd gone part-time and I think some part-time  
95 students, had they known what funding sources were available in the college  
96 network they might have done it full time. So I tell everyone now.

97 (PR to whole group) So you're in your final year now ... what's kept you going?

98 (Helen) Because you'll get your cap and gown! I've even, from Cosmopolitan, I've  
99 even simulated my picture and put the cap on, just to see! *[Laughter from group]*  
100 there I told you!

101 (Jill) No I just think what's kept me going is you're too far in ...

102 (Davina) For me it's finance wise because I just keep saying to my husband it's not  
103 long now, you know and I'll get a job and he just says oh it doesn't matter, just do  
104 what you want to do, but sometimes when you think I've had enough he just says  
105 how much have you got (to go) and I say oh yes, OK!

106 (PR) So you've gone that far into it that ...

107 (Peter) Too much to lose ...

108 (Davina) Financial wise it's not worth it ...

109 (Alison) Mine's more an example for my children, you know showing them what you  
110 can do and you need to do it when they finish rather than later and anything you  
111 want you can achieve and the work you put in you do get something out of it,  
112 especially for their future you know, and my future as well but for theirs.

113 (Helen) I say to mine now, don't do it when you're old like me, look at me and how  
114 much I have to do now juggling work and kids and going to university and it's tough,  
115 fitting it all in. I take them to the park with a book as they're picking up conkers, it's

116 terrible, I'm sitting on the toilet with a book while they're in the bath reading, it's a  
117 nightmare!

118 (Jill) But I don't think the young students do that. We were talking about this last  
119 week. You know, with the amount of work that's expected, the amount of reading  
120 material that's expected, I've got four kids and I became a grandma this year so I've  
121 had to adapt that into our life as well and there just are no days now where you get  
122 a full day.

123 (Helen) I feel guilty if I'm sitting reading a book doing nothing else.

124 (Hayley) See, men don't feel that. Or do you?

125 (Peter) I do.

126 (Hayley) I'd argue that.

127 (Peter) It's different though isn't it, because you've got different expectations.

128 (Hayley) Men can cut off from children; women don't.

129 (Jill) No I'd have to disagree; I couldn't be where I am today without the support of  
130 my husband.

131 (Hayley) No, I'm not saying that. My husband's good like that. What I'm saying is  
132 they don't think of every little detail like a woman does, I would say. I think if the kids  
133 forgot their lunchbox he wouldn't lose no sleep about that whereas I'd be running to  
134 the school.

135 (Jill) But so what? They do it differently don't they? The thing is I'm worried about  
136 when I leave and get a job will I be expected to revert back to that role?

137 (Hayley) What are you planning to do in the end?

138 (Jill) I'm in the process of developing a youth project in my own community to I  
139 intend to manage that for a year.

140 (PR) Let's come back to career aspirations a bit later. As final year students, what  
141 are your priorities for the year? We're at the start of the new academic year. What  
142 are you going to achieve?

143 *[mixture of voices]* To do well in my degree; to get four A's; to do well this year, to  
144 get a 2:2 ...

145 (Jill) Just to do well; to reflect on the marks you got last year and look at where you  
146 fell down and try your best – you won't get this chance again so you've got to look  
147 at it ...

148 (Helen) That's what I said, I mean all I keep saying to myself is only twelve weeks,  
149 only twelve weeks, only twelve weeks just to get your first semester out of the way,  
150 because I don't know, I just feel overwhelmed sometimes because the kids wanted  
151 to go for conkers and I couldn't take them or play with them as much as I wanted to  
152 do because I was sitting reading a book or sitting doing something else or doing IT  
153 ...

154 (Hayley) Your social life just gets put on a hold really, you know ...



155 (Helen) Even things like getting a decent meal, you know, you get things from the  
156 freezer that'll go in the oven and you'll only have to check it once. I love cooking but  
157 you just don't have the time.

158 (Alison) You've got to think as well, saying what you want to do – study wise or  
159 work wise – but you don't know, the circumstances that can change that but to me,  
160 family comes first and then this has to come second and as I say, my little boy's  
161 sick at the moment so it's trying to have no sleep and trying to have someone look  
162 after him while I'm here and he's the first concern I couldn't have got no one to look  
163 after him and if you miss something you miss too much.

164 (Hayley) It is very difficult. I think you need a medal for getting through it for that  
165 type of thing really. Young people don't seem to have the same problems that  
166 mature students have ...

167 (Helen) I think it's because we know it's our last chance, there's no second chances  
168 really.

169 (Jill) I think as well, when we first come here there was a huge recruitment drive for  
170 mature students and we were going to be accommodated for. I don't know any  
171 mature students who haven't got any students. But a comment was made to us last  
172 semester about time slots. You know? Nine o'clock starts are difficult, and it was a  
173 very flippant comment but it was well you're going to have to get used to it because  
174 in your third year it is compulsory. You know? And I just thought that is a bad  
175 attitude to take. Again, a module was cancelled and we weren't told about and I  
176 didn't mind – I didn't mind doing research – but for other students who didn't want to  
177 do it they didn't get a choice, they had to do it. And it throws you in terms of  
178 organisation – mentally to get your head round something like that, you didn't pick it  
179 because you didn't want to do it in the first place, and it's going to impact on your  
180 mark at the end of the day.

181 (Peter) We had that in our group. As I say, we're on a part-time course. Last year  
182 there was a gang of us and we've done it of a night all the way through and last  
183 year when we enrolled we were told we're not putting it on in the night because  
184 there's no money left so you'll have to come during the day. And like, I said hang  
185 on, you've had the money for this, you might have spent it on do's in St George's  
186 Hall – which was lovely – but like you've been paid for this guys so you've got to put  
187 it on for us.

188 (PR) What was the response?

189 (Peter) Well they said we've got no money and you don't understand but I said oh  
190 we do understand, you've got the money so you owe it to us so you've got to put it  
191 on. So they put it on in the end. But it was given as though it was a favour ...

192 (Jill) Like they've got bums on seats now that you're in. And you're too far in ...

193 (Peter) Yeah: well what they did was they bullied some people in the class. One  
194 woman said well I can sort it out through my flexi in work, you know? She was

195 bullied into doing something she didn't want to do in case she'd lose it, and after  
196 four years she said well ...

197 (PR) Is there a sense that the College looks after mature students differently or  
198 doesn't look after mature students differently?

199 (Karen) I came here because I'd heard it was very good for mature students but I've  
200 got two (six o'clock lectures) this year and I do have childcare and after school club  
201 but they shut at half five but I've got a private childminder but she finishes her day  
202 at half past five – like everyone else does. So as a favour she keeps them and I  
203 don't get home till seven o'clock now and it's really difficult and you can't complain  
204 about it because you don't want to use your kids as a reason for why something's  
205 difficult because you don't want to stand out. That's my biggest thing really because  
206 financial support they've been brilliant, I couldn't fault them, I couldn't fault them, I  
207 couldn't have done it without the support I've had from the university. But I think for  
208 accommodating mature students, with mature students with children, it's really  
209 difficult. And they just don't think. I know they have times when they have to put  
210 lectures on but they encourage mature students so these things they have to take  
211 on board – that even with child minders and after school clubs they finish work like  
212 everyone else does so it's a big problem ... and it's not so much the money,  
213 because I can pay. She finishes work at half five and so I have to ask for a favour  
214 and it is a problem. Because I think your kids ... because I do that she can't do  
215 swimming club anymore.

216 (Jill) And I think as well, younger students might not have to get in till nine o'clock,  
217 they might get their work done at eight o'clock whereas parents with children do  
218 other things ensuring when you come out of your door you know everything's done  
219 so I can come here and totally stress myself out! But in saying that, that's what  
220 drives mature students because we get better marks, because we want to do it,  
221 we're more motivated.

222 (Peter) But you know more stuff don't you? Because of your life experience ...

223 (Alison) You're organised a lot more.

224 (Karen) But that makes you more biased doesn't it? Certainly in Psychology anyway  
225 because you're kind of learning things. You think: well I know from experience that's  
226 not really true.

227 (Jill) When we were in first year and we had to do those presentations, all the young  
228 ones were talking about best pubs, the cheapest ale,

229 (Davina) And we were all there like 'saddoes'!

230 (Helen) But I think the young ones don't want to get up and do presentations  
231 whereas the older ones will. In our English class the young ones don't say a thing;  
232 we take the whole class.

233 (Davina) But don't you think sometimes no I'm not going to answer another  
234 question?



235 (Hayley) Sometimes we've thought we'll let someone else but in the end it's been  
236 that embarrassing and the tutor's looking at us!

237 (PR) So when you look back in your final year, what have been your critical  
238 incidents, the events that have stood out when you've thought gosh that was a  
239 watershed moment for me?

240 (Hayley) Getting my A!

241 (Helen) I was confident in IT just not in English and I just panicked.

242 (Jill) And I think as well, when you sign up for a module you don't know what it's  
243 going to be like. Last year we did *Volunteering in the Community* and that's  
244 changed my outlook on, well it's changed my career path now, completely changed  
245 my career path now. So I'll always remember that now. But in saying that, it's  
246 changed how the marking scheme is for applied research now. And it was a day  
247 out! But it was absolutely fantastic; it's opened a lot of doors. Another girl who  
248 worked with the homeless is now on their committee. But I got a high A for that but  
249 a D for the research because the skills required to do volunteering are the skills  
250 required to do research.

251 (Helen) We've changed English because it's a pre-seen paper ...

252 (Hayley) You've got to hound them to give you help. They don't realise that some  
253 mature students haven't been to school for twenty years so the skills to do an  
254 assignment aren't the same as the skills to do an exam. So really you need  
255 someone to say this is what's expected. I mean I do very well in assignments but  
256 get me in that exam and I can't focus on the question. I think you need someone to  
257 teach mature students how to do that because young ones are carried right the way  
258 through from their A levels.

259 (Jill) The attitude now is right you're not in second year now so we're not going to  
260 hold your hand.

261 (Hayley) I know that university is all about self-learning but I reckon that since I've  
262 come here I have self-learned.

263 (Alison) But really sometimes you can't learn because you don't get the feedback  
264 from your essays, you can't get feedback from your exams because it's not allowed.  
265 And it's the same with the tutor support because they have a set time. But if you've  
266 got commitments you can't get to see them, you cannot make time to see them.

267 (Peter) I've been coming one night a week for three hours. The tutors have been  
268 really good apart from one year in Geography. Rest of the time they've been great.  
269 What's let it down is administration – registry has been disgraceful. For the first two  
270 years we were off site; so you didn't even come in here except for exams; and you  
271 felt an idiot asking someone where the library is – well where's that? And even now  
272 we went to an induction and we were told all the community stuff now is going to be  
273 in Everton so here's all the old scousers here, let's put them in Everton.

274 (Alison) And another thing we found was the language of the tutors: some were too  
275 technical or some couldn't even speak English that well. We went into a subject and

276 you needed a dictionary to decipher what he was going on about. And he's trying to  
 277 teach us a technical module. But it was really hard; how are you meant to take it in?  
 278 (PR) So as final year students now, what's more important? Focusing on my job  
 279 now? Applying for jobs now or doing the degree work later?  
 280 (Peter) For me, I just want to get the degree because I have a job now and I'm not  
 281 bothered about the sort of grades I get – I just want the degree.  
 282 (Alison) What are you going to do with your degree?  
 283 (Hayley) See, you're just doing it for your own personal ... my brother did that ... but  
 284 we're doing it because we want to teach. So even though we're finishing this year  
 285 we've got the PGCE form to do; we have no choice. So it's different – we've got a  
 286 goal there.  
 287 (Jill) My goal is, and again as I've said before, Unique Learning not everybody liked  
 288 it but something one of the tutors said at the end of the first year was start planning  
 289 what you're going to do when you've got your degree. When you're in your first year  
 290 you think it's forever but it's not. And that's what I've been doing since the end of my  
 291 first year. So I'll probably do an IT course that I can understand in Blackburn House  
 292 for a year that I can understand when I graduate (laughs)!  
 293 (PR) So has the experience of being a higher education student been what  
 294 you thought it would be?  
 295 Group: 'No'! (laughter)  
 296 (Davina) I wanted to have more time really because I wanted to be a proper  
 297 student-ette! (laughter)  
 298 (Hayley.) I wanted to say that I missed out on all the fun bits ... like when you're 18,  
 299 I think it's too young because the majority aren't mature enough.  
 300 (Davina) My daughter's 21 and she's been working in BT and like yourself I kept  
 301 saying don't leave it till you're too old, if you're going to do it, do it and last week she  
 302 said to me, I've decided she said, I'm doing a design course and I'm going to  
 303 university and I was like, 'yes'! And I said, are you doing it this year or next year and  
 304 she said next year and I thought that's a nice age to do it, twenty-two.  
 305 (Hayley) I think if they're focused that's great, but there's a lot of young people who  
 306 aren't focused who come here because it's the best thing to do; we see it in the  
 307 classes all the time and they get a degree that really isn't going to be any use to  
 308 them at the end of the day. To me, if you spend three years in university you've got  
 309 to get a decent degree. My nephews come out with a third. I would be devastated if  
 310 I got a third. I would have to do the whole thing over again. Because to me that is  
 311 not good enough; it's saying you can only get forty per cent all the way through and  
 312 that to me is no good. So when they're twenty-one and a bit more mature they can  
 313 do an Access course and then decide and I said the same thing to my son if you're  
 314 not ready now get a job then decide.  
 315 (Peter) By then they might have financial commitments...  
 316 (Helen) You get used to the money as well.



317 (Hayley) But even still they're more mature – not everyone – but the majority.

318 (Karen) But if I was eighteen I think I would be doing exactly the same thing as they

319 are, just out having fun.

320 (Hayley.) But they can't do that and do a degree!

321 (Karen) But they can; they do. It's part of the student culture: move away from home

322 (Jill) It's accepted to do that then.

323 (Alison) And they help one another.

324 (Hayley) But a lot of them in our English class, they're scraping through, getting Ds

325 and they're doing resit after resit

326 (Karen) They're passing though ...

327 (Hayley.) That's what I'm saying but at the end of the day when they come to get a

328 job if they haven't got a 2:2 they're not going to get a teaching post.

329 (Helen) Most people I've spoke to in work who passed when they were young got a

330 2:2 and one lad who is really intelligent was getting all As in his maths got a 2:2 but

331 the thing is you can't have everything (the social life and the studying). You've got

332 to be extremely intelligent to get a 2:1 and enjoy student life. I think that's one in a

333 thousand.

334 (PR) If you weren't here and I had members of your closest family here with me,

335 how would they say you've changed during your time in higher education?

336 (Karen) My oldest daughter would say I was sad; she's does over do it, just sitting

337 working, she's just so sad ... and she went to college to do her A levels and she's

338 packed them in now and I'm gutted but I realised she was doing them because

339 that's what I wanted her to do and I hope I haven't put her off it because she's seen

340 every night what I'm like, working. But I accept now she's too young and shouldn't

341 be doing what I want her to do but she does say, you're so sad! Get a life! I think I

342 probably am sad really – I haven't been out for three years!

343 (Jill) My son said I suffer PMT for a whole month now!

344 (Karen) I think you make a lot of sacrifices. And I've got a six year old as well and I

345 think I've been a pretty bad mother for the past few years for a six year old because

346 she has missed out of doing a lot of things; I've got to go, what's important? I'm not

347 saying the kids aren't – the kids will always be there – I won't get another chance at

348 this. It's difficult because when she comes home from school and there's homework

349 you feel guilty: oh God I should have been working, I should have done that with

350 her. And at the weekend she'll say can we go somewhere and I'll go sorry I've got

351 to work. So I do think she's been pushed to the back a bit.

352 (Jill) I do think that's common among most mature students. My life's a folder: once

353 I've got everything in it I'm alright!

354 (Alison) I've become an insomniac – I'm awake constantly. There is a point where

355 you've got to say that's enough.

356 (Helen) We say it to each other! We're always on the phone, saying will you calm

357 down and stop worrying. But it works both ways because I've been up the wall for

358 the past few weeks because work's not been sorted out then there's kids' birthdays  
 359 then my hamsters went missing ... stupid things like that. Then you've still got to get  
 360 your work done. Sometimes you've got to just cut off, say I'm having a night off.

361 (PR) Has higher education changed the way you live your life? The way you have  
 362 leisure, the way you read, the way you spend your time off?

363 (Karen) When I was doing my Access course one of my tutors said once you start  
 364 getting back into education, once you're in that frame of mind you won't be watching  
 365 your soaps and you won't be doing this, but when you're going once a week it's not  
 366 too bad, but here I haven't got a clue who are the people on Brookside!

367 (Peter) I take my flexi-time in work to do my work.

368 (Helen) I do my college work in work, I was in work at seven, I got up at five, did half  
 369 an hour on the computer, went to work, seven o'clock I'm my phone at work and I'm  
 370 writing my report. I go to work with books and folders.

371 (Jill) When you're reading things now you understand them, whereas before you  
 372 wouldn't know what they're about, or things on the news like Tony Blair makes a  
 373 speech, I say 'cheek' and our Karl says 'did you understand what he said then?'  
 374 and you don't realise but you have took stuff in.

375 (Helen) Same in English, I get all the questions right on The Weakest Link now!

376 (Peter) Something my wife said, when we watch films now I spoil them for her. I did  
 377 this module in American Studies about dissecting films and you find yourself doing it  
 378 – it's a pain really!

379 (Jill) You find yourself dissecting your life. Analysing everything.

380 (Helen) Yes, everything: Eastenders – he's the villain; he's the tragic hero ...

381 (Karen) I don't think I've read for pleasure for a few years now, I used to read a lot  
 382 and now I only read for work, now.

383 (Jill) I used to enjoy playing with the computer, but I don't do that now. I don't have  
 384 the time. I miss that so much.

385 (Helen) You just learn what bits you need, don't you?

386 (PR) The final area I want to explore is career aspirations. Can you just say  
 387 something about your career aspirations – what you aspire to?

388 (Hayley) Secondary teaching: English literature.

389 (Helen) Primary school teacher. But I've got a feeling I won't stay there.  
 390 I'll do it for a few years but I've got a feeling – I can't see me staying as a teacher. I  
 391 want to do it, I've been in a school and I love it, Key Stage 2 is a junior school age  
 392 and you're really engaging, I just can't see me staying there. But I wouldn't mind  
 393 doing an MA as well – but probably part-time.

394 (Jill) Voluntary centre. The impact I've seen it have on young people has been  
 395 unbelievable. So that's what I want to do.

396 (Karen) I don't want to go into teaching. When I first started I didn't know what to do.  
 397 When I left college and went on to Access I did think about teaching but that was  
 398 because one of my tutors said you'll be a good teacher and then I thought going to



399 university meant to be a teacher and to be honest I didn't know until I talked to you  
400 how much there was available. I'm interested in the Prison Service only because in  
401 the summer I was invited into Walton Prison in the Psychology Department and I  
402 was really interested in what they were doing. I'm keen on doing that but having  
403 said that I didn't choose the BPS route which is what you need to go in there. But I  
404 could start as a Psych assistant and pick up the other modules, but I've become  
405 much more interested in people – obviously with the Psychology – I think it teaches  
406 you all about yourself, about your kids, why you do things and about yourself – you  
407 know, about college and what I do now, about your balances and sacrifices. I think  
408 it's really interesting. The Psychology Department here has made a huge  
409 impression on me and I would like in my career to make an impression on someone  
410 – to know you've done something. They can certainly say they've made a difference  
411 to my life. So it would be nice to know - even if one person says it.

412 (Alison) Mine was at first a senior teacher. I thought I couldn't do Geography and  
413 that (subjects required for primary teaching). But with coming in here and talking to  
414 the head teacher, she asked me why I didn't want to do the primary and when I  
415 explained she lifted that and now I realise I can do that and it's not a problem so  
416 that's my aim now: to go for this.

417 (Davina) I wanted to do teaching when I started and now I'm sort of wavering. But  
418 I'm still not settled on what I want to do.

419 (Jill) Doing the Access, they do tend to push for teaching.

420 (Hayley) On the B.Ed they push you to go for primary. I felt that I was pressured.  
421 They used to say you'll make a brilliant primary teacher because I'd worked in  
422 primary schools for three years as a classroom assistant or ESA then I thought no I  
423 want to keep my options open because who's to say when you're doing a single  
424 subject that you might start enjoying that and that's what's happened to me.

425 (Helen) And not just teaching: you could go into anything. You could get your place  
426 on your PGCE but finish and then another opportunity comes and think I'll do that  
427 instead.

428 (Karen) I think it's nice to think in the future or when you're finished, to do  
429 something that you couldn't have done without your degree. Those five years have  
430 got to be worth something. And I know it'll be really important for me getting my  
431 degree – that'll be a massive day for me and it'll mean a lot, but then to know that  
432 more doors are open, I can do something that I couldn't do before, that's important.  
433 It's not just about money; it's about giving yourself more opportunities.

434 (Hayley.) It's not when you go into teaching because there isn't any money in  
435 teaching!

436 (PR) So is that an important consideration – that you could do a job that you  
437 couldn't do before?

438 (Helen) Yes: it's profession; that you've got more choice.

439 (Karen) Because you know, my marriage broke up and I moved from Scotland from  
 440 a big house, he had really good money and I come back living with two kids in a flat  
 441 and it was desperate and I remember walking with the pram and thinking is this it?  
 442 And then I went back to college to do something – not to get here – but just to get  
 443 out of the flat.

444 (Jill) If you want something you have to make it happen. Everything I've ever  
 445 wanted I've achieved it – not right away but ...

446 (PR) When we meet together in a year's time, describe to me what you'll  
 447 be doing.

448 (Helen) I'll be on the PGCE.

449 (Jill) I'll be in a managerial position. Because I'm putting all my efforts and soul into  
 450 this (IT project) because what we're trying to do is achieve a big break through in a  
 451 much needed facility in an area that has always been considered affluent – and it's  
 452 not – and because it's on Penny Lane the name itself is a huge selling point: a  
 453 young person's internet drop in centre coupled with a drop in community centre.

454 (Helen) I think a lot of people are jealous when you're trying to get on.

455 (Karen) In a year's time it doesn't matter what I'm doing so long as I know that I'm  
 456 doing something because I came here, because I did what I did, whatever it is.  
 457 Even if it's back in education or working as part of a team or having responsibility.  
 458 I'll probably be still as stressed because life's still the same.

459 (PR) What can we do as a careers service to meet your needs as students?

460 (Karen) It would be good if someone could come round and tell us what options we  
 461 should take; you know, give a lecture and give options to people.

462 (Davina) I think although it's advertised a lot of students don't realise what they can  
 463 do.

464 (Karen) It's not very inviting, just to know you're there.

465 (Jill) A friend of mine didn't know you existed. So maybe at the end of lectures, if it  
 466 was like at the end of a Sociology lecture just to say this is what's happening in the  
 467 Careers department.

468 (Hayley) In the summer I didn't know because I don't use my Hope email account,  
 469 there were about three emails from this department and I didn't know they did that.

470 (Karen) When I came to see you I didn't know what I wanted to do and it was a bit  
 471 off putting because I thought what am I going to talk about?

472 (Jill) Maybe for the first years through Unique Learning. Or talk to different groups.

473 (Karen) If we had some sort of fair here, a career fair, that would really help. You  
 474 could meet these people (employers) and find out about them.

475 (Peter) I didn't know it was here. I didn't know you were here.



## **Appendix 6: Focus Group Questionnaire**

### **1. Being a final-year student**

- What does it feel like to be almost at the end of your degree course?
- Is being a final-year student very different from being a first or second year? How? Why?
- What's kept you going?
- What are your priorities for this year? What are the things that are most important to you?
- What sort of services do you make use of at College – counselling, careers, accommodation etc – have you always used these services or have things changed over the years?
- What sort of support have you received at Hope? Has it been enough, aimed at the right level etc?
- Looking back, what would you say have been the significant events that have perhaps shaped your time here? What have been the 'critical incidents' for you?
- Who have been the people who have had the most impact on you – good or bad?
- In social terms, have your relationships with other students changed while you've been here?
- What sort of student are you? Studious / conscientious / quiet / sociable?
- What's more important: studying hard in your final year to get a good degree and then applying for jobs; or focusing on applying for jobs early in the year before studying for your degree?
- Has being an undergraduate been as you expected?
- If you had the time again, what would you do differently?

### **2. If you are employed:**

- Are you currently working (what is your employment)? Has your job changed during your time in HE? (Promotion / redeployment / upgrading, etc.)
- What has been your employer's response while you have been studying?
- How have others in your workplace responded to you? Has this response changed?

### **3. Your previous education and work experience**

- What were your previous experiences of education (school, sixth form etc)?
- What did you do after leaving school?
- What did you do prior to entering HE? (Access? A levels?)

- While doing your Access course (if applicable) what was it like being a student again?
- What made you want to enter higher education? (And why didn't you do it when you were 18?)

#### **4. Study and home**

- When you were growing up, what sort of expectations did your family have for you in terms of education / work?
- Had anyone in your family / peer group gone to HE before? What were their responses when you enrolled?
- What sort of jobs did your family / friends / community work in?
- Might your family say you have changed during the time that you've been at Hope? If so, how? Are you a different person?
- How did your family / friends / community react when you told them you were going to go to university? Have their views changed over time?
- Have others in your family been to university before?
- What will your degree mean to your family?
- Has your time in higher education changed the way you live – leisure time, reading habits, social activities etc?
- Do you participate in non-curricula activities and events at the college? Have these impacted on your home life?

#### **5. Career aspirations**

- What will you do after you graduate? Describe it.
- How important were job prospects to you when you were thinking about enrolling in higher education?
- What's more important: getting the job you want; or getting the degree classification you want?
- What factors will you have to take into consideration when choosing your job? – Family? Pay? Location? Prospects? Hours of work?
- How do you see the opportunities available to you? How would you describe the graduate recruitment market – buoyant, competitive?
- If you hadn't entered higher education, what sort of life do you think you would be having now?
- Do you have a 'career role model' – someone that you look to as an example?
- Has your thinking about jobs changed during the time that you have been at Hope?
- What sort of salary do you expect to be earning in a year's time?
- As a final-year student, what can Career Development do to help you the most in your career planning? When we meet again in a year's time, describe to me what you'll be doing.



## **Appendix 7: Tracer Interview Transcript**

**Name:** 'Alison' (F8)

**Subject:** Graduate 2003

**Date:** 6 January 2004

**Venue:** Career Development, Liverpool Hope

1 (P) So, how does it feel coming back?

2 (F8) Great; I really do miss it; I really do miss it.

3 (P) Thanks for taking the time to come in ... so what's happened to you, just  
4 take us back, you graduated in July ...

5 (F8) Yes, I got a job, er in offices in town. Been to America! On holidays so  
6 that was fantastic with the kids. So I was just getting used to different working  
7 environments, wanted to try office work so I done that, and got finished er  
8 Christmas. Well they give it to me in December.

9 (P) The job finished or you decided ...

10 (F8) No, they finished. There was not work so I went back to square one so  
11 now I'm desperately looking for a job.

12 (P) So when you were here last time you were looking at teaching

13 (F8) No, I didn't want to do that!

14 (P) Then you changed your ideas. How have your ideas changed?

15 (F8) Er, I'd like to, as you say, get involved with adults getting them back to  
16 education post 16 you know, I'd like to do that but again an office  
17 environment, I'd still like to do that type of job, so I don't really know but I'll  
18 just keep on looking you know? I've got an interview with JET on Thursday.

19 (P) That's Liverpool isn't it?

20 (F8) Yes, an employment agency, er jobs, employment

21 (P) And training?

22 (F8) Yes, so I'll do that – I'll even do volunteering you know? To get into  
23 something you know?

24 (P) So working with adults, is this something you're looking at?

25 (F8) Yes: or post-16, after 16, working with adults.

26 (P) So what appeals to you about that type of work?

27 (F8) I think, what appeals to me is because I look at youngsters leaving  
28 school thinking there's no jobs and looking at like 18 or 19 and there's no  
29 hope, and it's getting back in and showing them that there is a way to get  
30 back in to education that's better than ... that offers a better future.

31 (P) So that's important to you then?

32 (F8) Yeah, very. Well my son, he left school and he just doing little bits and  
33 bobs and he went to Camp America and he started uni from September, he  
34 started John Moores.

35 (P) Gosh, that's great isn't it?

36 (F8) Yeah, and he's got no formal qualifications, he's got like the NVQ  
 37 advanced, but in the forces so he was really lucky to get a place.

38 (P) You've been an example to him?

39 (F8) Yeah, definitely. That's what he said, yeah. And my daughter, she's  
 40 what – fifteen and she's ready for the GCSE's and she's really focussed and  
 41 got what she wants to do, she wants to go into accountancy or banking,  
 42 university, yeah, all those aims ...

43 (P) Wow ...

44 (F8) Yeah ... all those things.

45 (P) So that's had an effect ...

46 (F8) Yeah, uni ...

47 (P) You doing it has ...

48 (F8) Shown them that anyone can do it – and the one that's really surprised  
 49 me is my son because he's, the school let him down you know, he was in a  
 50 school where they thought, he was in a class where they brought children  
 51 who had been expelled but they were bright children and they were  
 52 disrupting so it disrupted him so he came out with two GCSEs so he went to  
 53 college and he thought I'll never get in and I said well you don't know till you  
 54 try and he filled in and

55 (P) Wow, isn't that amazing?

56 (F8) So I'm still up there typing essays till two in the morning for him (laughs)  
 57 he can't type so I said I don't mind typing you know, so ...

58 (P) So the interest in the office job, and the interest in education ... is that a  
 59 difference?

60 (F8) No, it's well, I think you've got to realise that whatever job there's a lot of  
 61 administration work goes with it, computers and I think if you know how the  
 62 administration goes it makes your job a lot easier. Because I think a lot of  
 63 these things they say do this or do that in your own time so that's extra so  
 64 you're up, you're weekends aren't free – you're catching up on all your  
 65 administration work. So that's it – to get all brushed up on those type of skills  
 66 as well.

67 (P) Do you feel any different from when we last spoke and you were facing  
 68 final exams and ... do you feel like your personal circumstances have  
 69 changed at all? Does it feel any different?

70 (F8) I ... no. I just miss it. I really do. I want to continue some sort of study or  
 71 ... and I've applied for some jobs, you know like Sure Start, like lifelong  
 72 learning, where they give me the opportunity to go in and carry on your  
 73 education whether on day courses or whatever, but that is, it's such a change  
 74 ... you know, when you graduate and you see all that ceremony and you turn  
 75 round and it is, it's a lifelong circle. You do want to continue.

76 (P) So you didn't say, wow, that's it, I'm finished?

77 (F8) At the time I did, I thought lovely. I must admit I thought no more books.  
 78 But, give yourself a couple of months off and you're ready to go for it again. I



79 didn't realise. And now as I say, with my son he's doing youth work and his  
80 books – I'm reading his books to keep myself on top and I'm helping him and  
81 we've discussed things and I'm helping his, we're doing all his and helping  
82 him with his work and he's showing me different issues and that I'd never  
83 thought of so it's good, you know? Being able to do that.

84 (P) So the student side of you hasn't stopped?

85 (F8) No. I don't think it will ever turn off, you know. I do really love you know,  
86 coming back here. I do really miss it. Me and F9 were on the phone, like, 'Oh,  
87 I wish we were back' you know, you do really miss it.

88 (P) Isn't that amazing? Just looking back when you were in college, what  
89 would you say were the main skills that you gained from Liverpool Hope?

90 (F8) Confidence ... was the main thing. Communication skills. What else? It  
91 was mainly confidence.

92 (P) Can you say more about that?

93 (F8) Confidence: it, well I came here, I lacked confidence, even now I still  
94 lack confidence –more reserved and to most I'm, to others F9 - she's very  
95 outright and she can express herself and I couldn't. Well, it gave me the  
96 confidence, in this environment to say, to stand up to people and say: hold  
97 on, this is my opinion. This is what I think. It's not all on their opinion and  
98 agreeing with them. It's you having your own opinion and looking at things  
99 from different perspectives, because that gives you a confidence because it  
00 gives you a greater knowledge, you know?

01 (P) Do you use these skills, confidence and communication, everyday now?

02 (F8) Yes, everyday. Communication skills. Well I'm talking with a wide variety  
03 of little ones. Well I don't a research project for university so I'm still in contact  
04 with the lady who runs that so I'm in contact that way with them and even  
05 now when looking for jobs, at one time I'd say I don't know what to do, don't  
06 know what I want to do, but now I find I'm I want to do this and I want to do  
07 that and I've got this and I've got that ... I can learn. And it shows my skills  
08 and my ability. I can learn. I welcome knowledge and you know, so ...

09 (P) Would you have been different – I know this is a hard question – would  
10 you have been different in the office job that you'd have done that without  
11 coming to Hope? Would you have been different?

12 (F8) I don't really think so in the office job because it was just a basic office  
13 job. I knew, I was better for it - I was more qualified than the staff in there, the  
14 admin managers. And I couldn't, I wanted to turn around and say well you  
15 could do this and you could do that but you can't. I had to take a step back.

16 (P) Did they know you were a graduate?

17 (F8) Yes. But that was it. They were just ... I was just there really ... just  
18 basic skills and all that, but it was the type of company who already had  
19 people in place but the people in place weren't doing the job so that's why  
20 they lost a lot of work and went down.

121 (P) How did they respond to you being a graduate – presumably some of  
 122 them weren't graduates?

123 (F8) Well they thought, well the bosses again knew the job was too good for  
 124 me (sic), they said er, we can't offer you, well they knew it was a stop-gap till  
 125 I found something else. I just wanted to be in that environment while I was  
 126 applying for jobs. 'Cos as you say, while you're in a job you're probably in a  
 127 better chance of getting another one. That's my aim.

128 (P) Yes. Has your attitude to jobs and work and salaries and conditions and  
 129 things changed because of higher education?

130 (F8) Yes, because er, salary, even the job I went for the money wasn't good,  
 131 but I get supplemented with Working Family Tax, but I do want a good salary  
 132 but my main aim is I want a job with a pension.

133 (P) Right.

134 (F8) That's my main aim. I'd like to get in a job and I'd stick with them for  
 135 twenty years. You know I'd give them twenty years of my time if it had a good  
 136 working environment, offered me opportunity to better myself and financial  
 137 rewards like pensions ... so I'd be quite happy.

138 (P) Have you got a salary target – like a 'graduate' salary target ... does that  
 139 make sense?

140 (F8) Well, maybe in the real world what you'd say is maybe twenty-five, but  
 141 it's not to me. I think anything over sixteen is a bonus because I've seen,  
 142 where we live today, it's hard getting those type of jobs. You're looking at  
 143 fifteen upwards even for a graduate now you know? So I'd be happy, you  
 144 know, it's not ...

145 (P) Yeah – you've answered that question. Would you say with a degree your  
 146 earning potential has increased?

147 (F8) Yeah, yeah. Well it's given me greater opportunity to apply for jobs what  
 148 maybe I thought I'll never do that, *qualification* wise. And even when you see  
 149 jobs and it's got er, say ten thousand upwards to say fifteen, now to me I  
 150 know the scale, really they should pay me more the fifteen because I'm  
 151 qualified. Maybe not experienced, but as far as qualifications I'm up there  
 152 with the rest of them. You know? And the matter of experience, well I've done  
 153 this so I shouldn't take long to become experienced because of all I've been  
 154 through in the past three years.

155 (P) Yes. You're in the job market now. What's it like to be a graduate in the  
 156 job market - what's it like from a graduate's perspective?

157 (F8) Well I've only been looking for the past two weeks. Horrible: nothing  
 158 there.

159 (P) Tough, tough environment?

160 (F8) Really is tough. It's just now really - it's a matter of looking for networks.  
 161 It's mostly people you know – friends you know, I come back here and see  
 162 you lot. It's only through talking, you know I've heard of JET agencies, it's  
 163 only people I've seen who say well come here, go see them.



164 (P) So that network that you had that's still very much there?  
 165 (F8) Yeah. Yeah.  
 166 (P) OK. Well we've looked at how you feel being a graduate. I mean, as a  
 167 Hope graduate do you feel different from a graduate from Liverpool  
 168 University or John Moores? Does it make any difference?  
 169 (F8) No it doesn't make any difference. I mean at the end of the day we've  
 170 got a Liverpool University degree so ... I don't really think ... to me that  
 171 doesn't make any difference. You've gone out, you've got your experience so  
 172 where you've got your degree shouldn't matter.  
 173 (P) It's said that sometimes ... some people have said that when graduates  
 174 leave university they go into a low time, a bit of a slump, missing it ...  
 175 (F8) You do, you feel depressed ...  
 176 (P) Did you feel like that?  
 177 (F8) Yeah, you do. And even now er, as I say, I'm out of work and with  
 178 Christmas I wish I was back. It's like a safety net in here, you know. You're  
 179 working and you're like surrounded and you knew you could go to uni and do  
 180 your work and you were fine, go home ... whereas now it's not.  
 181 (P) If you could go and speak to first year students now on your course, what  
 182 would you tell them?  
 183 (F8) To make the most of your time really, and use you know, build up as  
 184 much friends and network of people while you're here and keep in contact in  
 185 the future and try and think of yourself you know, when you go for your  
 186 exams, just do the work on time and make sure that everything's what you  
 187 need: because your last year is important.  
 188 (P) If you were asked to sum up your experiences at Hope, what would you  
 189 say?  
 190 (F8) For me? God it was a nightmare. It was a totally new experience. And it  
 191 was one where I've seen myself grow in the three years – from starting work,  
 192 the first few weeks I was leaving, I was crying, I couldn't cope with the work,  
 193 people had better skills than me, you know? Seemed to be more  
 194 knowledgeable than me ... thought I'd never ever get to where I am now. And  
 195 it's only through, as I say, certain tutors' support, meeting good friends, who  
 196 you're there for one another – you're there to support one another – and  
 197 being able to rely on them like, and they can rely on you. It's just like a  
 198 journey; you can see yourself grow and ... and it's nice. At the end you see  
 199 the Graduation and it's just a whole, it's enlightening... a new experience.  
 200 You grow up.  
 201 (P) So on your journey then, a journey can go both ways, what were the good  
 202 parts and the bad parts?  
 203 (F8) The bad parts were, er, maybe not being, not prioritising the workloads  
 204 and you realise, having commitments like being a single parent, and having  
 205 to have a job I couldn't put in as much time as I'd like to put in, and another  
 206 thing ... starting off being too nice and letting other people take advantage by

207 helping them a bit too much with their work, letting them get the praise and  
 208 you're thinking well hold on a minute that's my work. They're the bad bits and  
 209 being able to say, no I don't want this now.

210 (P) So did you learn techniques or strategies?

211 (F8) Yeah. Well that's what I mean: to begin with I just went with the flow and  
 212 after that I thought 'no': this is my degree, nobody else's. Nobody else should  
 213 benefit from that sort of thingyo. I mean aren't pulling their weight or that sort  
 214 of thing. So that was the bad part as you say, the workloads. And maybe  
 215 thinking you, what I didn't like in certain aspects were we might have put 110  
 216 per cent in class effort wise – talks, opinions, you kept a class going and you  
 217 got nothing for it, come the exams. You maybe flunked – a bit – because as I  
 218 say with my workload and whatever that should be taken into account. You  
 219 know? More even. I mean like when you've got percentages? The first year  
 220 you've got participating in your class – it's like ten percent or whatever? But  
 221 as, especially in Sociology that's all to do with your personal experiences and  
 222 views and opinions and I felt because we were mature students we were  
 223 given the vast amount

224 (P) Yes, I remember you saying that.

225 (F8) Even the tutors ... you felt you put all your effort in then you go and do  
 226 an exam; it's really down heartening.

227 (P) So I remember you saying that you felt different from younger students –  
 228 being a mature student, with a family ... did that carry on, did you feel less  
 229 different as things carried on?

230 (F8) No, you got on with them, I mean, they seen you differently as well  
 231 because you could go in and hold a conversation and stand up and give a  
 232 presentation or whatever they thought you were really clever and when they  
 233 saw your marks at the end – 'My God! How come you got so low, sort of  
 234 thing?' 'We got such and such!' and we used to say well you've got the  
 235 books, you've got the time, we haven't, you know? So it works both ways.  
 236 But they seemed to like party and then in the last few weeks knuckle down.  
 237 And I found quite a few got extensions a lot of the time and done it, whereas  
 238 we never really asked for it – you were going to hand it in anyway on time,  
 239 you know, you don't get no marks for that so maybe I've learned that part of  
 240 it. So putting in for extensions and, you know?

241 (P) Yeah, I remember speaking to you and you said your group didn't  
 242 participate in extra-curricula activities ...

243 (F8) We couldn't ...

244 (P) You just didn't have the time? Looking back, would you have done it  
 245 differently at all – got involved in sports groups and that?

246 (F8) Looking back I wish I'd have done it at 18 or 19 but looking back it's no  
 247 use having regrets; I've got a family, I had to support them. I would like to  
 248 have been involved in certain aspects but it was, it wasn't something that I  
 249 could have been involved in so it wasn't really an issue. What extra time we



250 had it was like going to J's for study. Last Christmas we had two days off and  
251 I was at her house until twelve, one o'clock in the morning. So there was no  
252 time for going out and socialising – I mean that would have been nice to have  
253 gone out and maybe mixed with them more and gone for a drink but again, it  
254 was money: financial issues. I think because you're older you have financial  
255 priorities.

256 (P) Have you noticed – or has anyone in your family noticed – that how you  
257 spend your time off has changed – reading different papers, do different  
258 things? Some students have said they can't watch the television in the same  
259 way because they're always criticising it!

260 (F8) Well I must admit I don't watch telly a lot now because as I say with my  
261 son doing his study he's bringing his books in and I'm reading his books on  
262 issues on, well to do with sociology, so I don't have much time to watch TV.

263 (P) Right: have your views changed or anything, attitudes?

264 (F8) Yes, because my little boy, he's been going to the museum, you know,  
265 getting involved with the Romans – we look at the books – all things like that,  
266 the Internet – I'm not afraid now to go out and look for stuff on the internet or  
267 take him to different places or you know where he's asking me a question,  
268 one time I'd say I'll tell you later. I sit down now and explain things you know,  
269 more? Give them five minutes.

270 (P) In terms of keeping contact with people from Hope ...

271 (F8) Yes, I keep contact with J – maybe it might not be for two weeks, we  
272 might not see each other all the time but we do try to keep contact. And we  
273 went out on my birthday and got drunk – so we do try to keep contact!

274 (P) So in terms of further study, do you see yourself carrying on for higher  
275 degrees?

276 (F8) Yes, I'd love to, but again it's financial reasons because I think you've  
277 got to think of yourself. I mean maybe if I was in a better position in a job in a  
278 few years maybe I would come back and do something else ... I'd love to.

279 (P) Right: I'm going to do my experiment now: there's a theory that graduates  
280 fit into different categories when they're looking for jobs. If you could, read  
281 through them and prioritise them – which is your favourite and least favourite  
282 ...?

283 (F8) That one (Socially committed) Careerists, 2; Flexible 3; Ritualists maybe  
284 the least likely; but there's a few here. (The drop out was one of the least  
285 relevant) 'I don't drop out of life' 'You can't get away from life'.

286 (P) What is it about those three – socially committed, flexible and careerists –  
287 what is it that makes them most like you?

288 (F8) This one (SC) I think it's because you're showing people with different  
289 backgrounds – especially people from working class backgrounds who  
290 maybe need a little bit more support and help but you can do things with their  
291 lives, there is a future for them and you need to remember there are people  
292 like them and do something so the idea is what you do – again with your

293 children, it's a never ending cycle, you always want better for the next  
 294 generation and I think by showing strong values and beliefs you ... and  
 295 again, now that times are changing, there's a lot of single parents out there –  
 296 hours, flexible hours – times change, jobs change, you've got to be flexible to  
 297 go out there.

298 (P) Can you just say, before you came to Hope, would you have still chosen  
 299 the cards you chose?

300 (F8) Maybe not, maybe not, no ... (chooses the non careerist card).

301 (P) So perhaps being here has changed what you're looking for?

302 (F8) Yeah. It has. It's helped me find out more about myself – what  
 303 everybody else expects of me, sort of thing. I'm an important person now, not  
 304 them.

305 (P) So it's focusing on you?

306 (F8) Yeah. If I feel good then that reflects on everyone else around me.

307 (P) Whereas before?

308 (F8) Whereas before I was like with the children, when I was married with my  
 309 husband I was just there to make sure that everything else was going in  
 310 order you know, just dally 'houseworky' mother type of thing, which you know  
 311 was boredom ... nothing really. Once you've had your children reach an age  
 312 you can't do any more for them.

313 (P) That's the time to do ...

314 (F8) And when my marriage broke up and all the problems I went through –  
 315 because he was an alcoholic and everything – they all made me realise I can  
 316 either join him or get my life sorted.

317 (P) In terms of career help, did the college do enough?

318 (F8) They were there for you it was just that you were wrapped up with so  
 319 much other stuff as I say – home, work, studies – it was just getting through  
 320 you know, the terms? I didn't really think of a job, I thought I wanted to be a  
 321 teacher but no, I didn't want to do that, you know? It's not until you really sit  
 322 down and think about what you want to do. While I was here all I thought  
 323 about was assignments, what had to be in, so you don't really value the  
 324 resources until it's too late.

325 (P) That decision to be a teacher – where did that come from?

326 (F8) I did a bit of volunteering and I thought oh maybe I could do this but as I  
 327 got further on and watching my children and their attitudes – I don't want to  
 328 be there, I don't want to do that, you know? A lot of the time it's like banging  
 329 your head against a brick wall – you might get out of a class of 30, 2 that are  
 330 really interested ...

331 (P) What was the interview like for the PGCE?

332 (F8) That was fine, fine, but it was actually when I was doing it, when I was  
 333 sitting in the hall and listening that I thought I don't want to be here type of  
 334 thing!

335 (P) So you knew then you didn't want to do it?



336 (F8) Yes, well I was just going along with it.  
337 (P) Was there a pressure to be a teacher – sometimes people say there's a  
338 pressure at Hope for students to become teachers? Did you feel like that?  
339 (F8) No, but I think it's because you get the opportunity to carry on studying  
340 without actually paying ... you're getting another twelve months of going in  
341 and learning something new.  
342 (P) Yes, of course. So when you didn't get it , it wasn't a problem?  
343 (F8) No, it was a relief!  
344 (P) So tell me about your plans for the future?  
345 (F8) My plans for the future? I honestly don't know. I don't really look that far  
346 ahead. All I want, as I said before, is a job working with post-sixteen's or an  
347 agency like helping or supporting people, but I want to be able to carry on  
348 learning, whether it's in their jobs or doing more exams. I want to keep active  
349 ... I wouldn't move out of Merseyside because of the children, and again, just  
350 ensure that when they're happy and I can help them with their work and I just  
351 really want a secure future for myself. I just don't know what it might hold –  
352 maybe have a few nice luxuries for myself on the way, a holiday now and  
353 again ...  
354 (P) Any other points that you'd like to make?  
355 (F8) And again, that Unique Learning, that was horrible but looking back that  
356 was really useful. You know when you've got to give a presentations, critical  
357 analysis – what do I need this for – communication skills. And I was there  
358 standing up shaking then I thought oh blow it, they're only human, so building  
359 up your confidence and thinking well there's others. And the critical thinking  
360 ... at home you see yourself analysing stuff, whereas before maybe you  
361 wouldn't. All little things, that was really useful. After the first initial shock, we  
362 come up to Christmas and we loved it. But on the whole I can't fault this  
363 place.

<b>Appendix 8: Student Participation Table</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Research Activity</b>	<b>Participants</b>
11 February 2002	Focus Group 1 (pilot)	Aisha (F3) Alison (F8) Jill (F9) Davina (F20)
04 March 2002	Focus Group 2	Samantha (F1) Jo (F2)
04 March 2002	Focus Group 3	Mike (M10) Connie (F11) Susan (F12) Alice (F13) Stan (M21) Bob (M22) Henry (M23) Sid (M24) Anthony (M27) Don (M28)
08 October 2002	Focus Group 4	Peter (F5) Alison (F8) Jill (F9) Helen (F17) Hayley (F18) Karen (F19) Davina (F20)
07 January 2003	Interview (pilot)	Lucy (F14)
10 January 2003	Interview (1)	Connie (F11)
14 January 2003	Interview (2)	Alice (F13)
22 January 2003	Interview (3)	Susan (F12)
05 March 2003	Interview (4)	Patrick (M6)
12 March 2003	Interview (5)	Lenny (M7)
15 March 2003	Interview (6)	Alison (F8)
15 March 2003	Interview (7)	Jill (F9)
17 March 2003	Interview (8)	Andy (M16)
17 March 2003	Interview (9)	Danny (M26)
17 March 2003	Interview (10)	Stan (M25)
17 March 2003	Interview (11)	Karen (F19)
19 December	Tracer Interview (pilot)	Carol (F15)
06 January 2004	Tracer (1)	Alison (F8)
08 January 2004	Tracer (2)	Andy (M16)
12 January 2004	Tracer (3)	Alice (F13)



<b>15 January 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (4)</b>	<b>Patrick (M6)</b>
<b>19 January 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (5)</b>	<b>Peter (M5)</b>
<b>21 January 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (6)</b>	<b>Susan (F12)</b>
<b>22 January 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (7)</b>	<b>Bob (M22)</b>
<b>12 February 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (8)</b>	<b>Jill (F9)</b>
<b>25 February 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (9)</b>	<b>Karen (F19)</b>
<b>18 March 2004</b>	<b>Tracer (10)</b>	<b>Mike (M10)</b>

# References

- Adenekan, S. and Garner, M. (2003) *You pays your money, you makes your choice*, THES, London, 14/11/03
- AGCAS (2003a) *AGCAS Resources Survey 2003*, The Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, Sheffield. 2003a
- AGCAS (2003b) *A career in teaching*, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, Sheffield.
- AGR (1995) *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century*, Association of Graduate Recruiters, London.
- AGR (2002) *Graduates in the eyes of employers*, 2002
- Anderson, H. and Munch, R. (1999) *Neighbourhood Images in Liverpool: it's all down to the people.*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999
- Archer, L. and Hutchings, M. (2000) Bettering yourself? Discourses of risk, cost and benefit in ethnically diverse young working class non-participants' constructions of higher education *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 21. 4, 555 - 574.
- Arnold, J. (1997a) *Managing Careers into the 21st Century*, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd, London.
- Arnold, J. (1997b) Nineteen propositions concerning the nature of effective thinking for career management in a turbulent world *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 25. 4, 447 - 461.
- Arnold, J., Silvester, J., Patterson, F., Robertson, I., Cooper, C. and Burnes, B. (2004) *Work Psychology: Understanding Human Behaviour in the Workplace*, Prentice Hall, London.
- Baldwin, T. and Halpin, T. (2004) *Graduate glut devalues price of a degree*, The Times, London, 29/03/04
- Ball, S. J., Davies, J., David, M. and Reay, D. (2002) 'Classification' and 'Judgement': social class and the 'cognitive structures' or choice of Higher Education *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23. 1, 51 -72.
- Bamber, J. and Tett, L. (1999) Opening the doors of higher education to working class adults: a case study *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 18. 6, 465 - 475.



- Bandura, A. (1994) *Self-Efficacy In Encyclopaedia of Human Behaviour*, Vol. 4 (Ed, Ramachaudran, V. S.) Academic Press, New York, pp. 71 - 81.
- Bassey, M. (1999) *Case study research in educational settings*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Baty, P. (2003) *Poorest will get student support of up to £2,100*, The Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 24/01/03
- Baumgardner, S. R. (1977) Vocational Planning: The Great Swindle *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 56. 1, 17 - 23.
- Beck, U. (1994) *Risk Society: Beyond a new modernity*, Sage Publications Ltd, London.
- Bee, P. (2003) *Staying the course*, The Times, London, 26/11/03
- Bernstein, B. (1965) *A Socio-Linguistic Approach to Social Learning* In *Key Quotations in Sociology*, Vol. (Ed, Thompson, K.) Routledge, London, pp. 42.
- Blackburn, R. and Jarman, J. (1993) Changing inequalities in access to British universities *Oxford Review of Education*, 19. 2.
- Bourdieu, P. (1988) *Homo Academicus*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996) *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1999) *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Bourdieu, P. (2000) *Distinction. A social critique of the judgement of taste*.
- Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C. (1964) *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*, University of Chicago Press, London.
- Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C. (1994) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Sage, London.

- Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. J. D. (1996) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Brennan, J. and Shah, T. (2003) *Access to What? Converting Educational Opportunity into Employment Opportunity*, Centre for Higher Education Research and Employment, London.  
2003
- Brignall, M. (2003) *Are you being served?*, The Guardian, London, 18/10/03
- Brine, J. and Waller, R. (2004) Working-class women on an Access course: risk, opportunity and (re) constructing identities *Gender & Education*, 16. 1, 97 - 113.
- Britton, C. and Baxter, A. (1999) Becoming a Mature Student: gendered narratives of the self *Gender & Education*, 11. 2, 179 - 193.
- Britton, C. and Baxter, A. (2001) Risk, Identity and Change: becoming an mature student *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11. 1, 87 - 102.
- Brown, P. and Hesketh, A. J. (2004a) *The Mismanagement of Talent - Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Brown, P. and Hesketh, A. J. (2004b) *The Mismanagement of Talent: Employability and Jobs in the Knowledge Economy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Brown, P. and Scase, R. (1994) *Higher education and corporate realities: class, culture and the decline of the graduate career*, UCL Press, London.
- Brown, R., Hesketh, A. J. and Williams, S. (2003) Employability in a Knowledge-driven Economy *Journal of Education and Work*, 16. 2, 107 - 126.
- Burke, R. (1998) Changing career rules: clinging to the past or accepting the new reality. *Career Development International*, 3. 1, 40 - 45.
- Burke, R. and Macdermid, G. (1999) A view of their economic future: an exploratory study among recent business school graduates *Education & Training*, 41. 1, 4 - 19.



- Burr, V. (2000) *An introduction to Social Constructionism*, Routledge, London.
- Butcher, V. (2000) *Higher Education Careers Service Review: Liverpool Hope Career Development Case Study*, NICEC, 2000
- CACI (2003) *Wealth of the Nation, 2003*, CACI Information Solutions, London. 2003
- Callender, C. (2003) *Student debt: truly a class issue*, The Guardian, London, 25/11/03
- Callender, C. and Brown, P. (2003) *Degrees of debt - how poorer students are put off university*, The Edge, November 2003
- Careernet (2002).
- CIHE (2004) *The Value of Graduates*, Council for Industry and Higher Education, London. 2004
- Clare, J. (2003) *Graduates settle for jobs as clerks or secretaries*, Daily Telegraph, London, 18/6/03
- Cohen, L. and Mannion, L. (1989) *Research Methods in Education*, Routledge, London.
- Collinson, P. (2001) *Local gulf between rich and poor*, The Guardian, London, 20/1/01
- Connor, H. (1995) *Making the right choice: how students choose universities and colleges*, Institute for Employment Studies, 1995
- Connor, H. (1999) *Social class and higher education: issues affecting decisions on participation by lower social class groups*, Department for Education and Employment, 1999
- Connor, H., Dewson, S., Tyers, C., Eccles, J., Regan, J. and Aston, J. (2001) *Social Class and Higher Education: issues affecting decisions on participation by lower social class groups*, Institute for Employment Studies, Brighton. 2001
- Croot, D. and Chalkley, B. (1999) *Geographers in England and Wales Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 23. 1, 21 - 47.
- D.f.E.E. (1998) *The Learning Age: Higher Education for the 21st Century*, Department for Education and Employment, London. 1998

- D.f.E.E. (2000) Department for Education & Skills.
- D.f.E.E. (2001) *Developing modern higher education careers services*, Department for Education and Employment, London. 2001
- D.f.E.S. (2002) *Regional Trends*, Department for Education and Skills, London. 2002
- D.f.E.S. (2003) *The Future of Higher Education*, Department for Education and Skills, London. 2003
- DFEE (2000) *Blackstone announces major review of university careers services*, Department for Education and Employment, London. 2000
- Dick, B. (2002), Vol. 2004  
[www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html](http://www.scu.edu.au/schools/gcm/ar/arp/grounded.html).
- Economist (1998) *The leaving of Liverpool*, The Economist, London, 15/8/98
- Elias, P., McKnight, A., Pitcher, J., Purcell, K. and Simm, C. (2000) *Moving On: Graduate careers three years after graduation*, Careers Service Unit (CSU), 2000
- Elias, P. and Purcell, K. (2003) *Measuring change in the graduate labour market*, ESRC / HECSU, Warwick. 2003
- Fazackerley, A. (2003) *Poor students are four times less likely to go to university than their better-off counterparts*, The Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 10/10/03
- Forsyth, A. and Furlong, A. (2000) *Socioeconomic disadvantage and access to higher education*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2000
- Gahan, C. and Hannibal, M. (1999) *Doing Qualitative Research Using QSR NUD\*IST*, Sage Publications Ltd, London.
- Garside, J. (2002), Vol. 2004 Universities UK.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Self Identity*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Giddens, A. (2002) *Runaway World: How Globalisation is Reshaping Our Lives*, Profile Books Ltd, London.
- Glaser, B. G. and Strauss, A. L. (1967) *The discovery of grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*, Aldine, New York.



- GMLSC (2002) *Labour Market Analysis of Greater Merseyside*, Greater Merseyside LSC, Liverpool. 2002
- GMLSC (2003) *Skills Assessment*, Greater Merseyside Learning and Skills Council, Liverpool. 2003
- Goddard, A. (2003) *Dropout rates are down while access drive has little impact*, Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 12/12/03
- Gorard, S., Rees, G. and Fevre, R. (1999) Patterns of Participation in Lifelong Learning: do families make a difference? *British Educational Research Journal*, 25. 4, 517 - 532.
- Gouldner, A. W. (1957) Cosmopolitans and Locals: Toward an analysis of latent social roles - 1 *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 2. 3, 281 - 306.
- Grenfell, M. and James, D. (1998) *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory*, Falmer Press, London.
- GTI (2004) *Target Teaching*, GTI Ltd, London.
- Hamel, J., Dufour, S. and Fortin, D. (1993) *Case study methods*, Sage University, California.
- Harker, R., Marhar, C. and Wilkes, C. (1990) *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu*, Macmillan, London.
- Harre, R. and Langenhove, L. v. (1999) *Positioning Theory*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford.
- Harris, M. (2001) *Developing modern higher education careers services*, Department for Education and Employment, 2001
- Harvey, L., Moon, S., Geall, V. and Bower, R. (1997) *Graduates' Work: Organisational change and students' attributes*, University of Central England, Birmingham. 1997
- Hawkins, P. (1995) *Skills for Graduates in the 21st Century*, Association of Graduate Recruiters, London.
- Hayes, K., King, E. and Richardson, J. T. E. (1997) Mature students in higher education III - Approaches to studying in access students *Studies in Higher Education*, 22. 1, 19.
- HEFCE (1998) *Widening participation special funding programme, 1998-1999: Circular 98/35*, Higher Education Funding Council for England, Bristol. 1998

- HEFCE (2003) *Performance indicators show small reduction in drop-out rates*, Higher Education Funding Council for England, London. 2003
- HEFCE (2004), Vol. 2004 Higher Education Funding Council for England.
- Hesketh, A. J. (2000) Recruiting an elite? Employers' perceptions of graduate education and training *Journal of Education and Work*, 13. 5, 245 - 271.
- Hesketh, A. J. (2001) In *Graduate labour market Conference* Lancaster University.
- Hill, P. (2004) *There are more graduates than well paid jobs*, Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 13/08/04
- Hodkinson, P. (1998) *Career Decision Making and the Transition from School to Work In Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory*, Vol. (Eds, Grenfell, M. and James, D.) Falmer Press, London, pp. 89 - 103.
- Hodkinson, P. (2000) Learning careers: continuity and change in young people's dispositions to learning *British Educational Research Council*, 26. 5.
- Hodkinson, P., James, D., Grenfell, M., Reay, D. and Robbins, D. (1998) *The Practice of Theory In Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory*, Vol. (Ed, James, D.) Falmer Press, London, pp. 122 - 149.
- Hodkinson, P. and Sparkes, A. (1993) Young people's career choices and careers guidance action planning: a case study of training in action *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 21. 3, 246 - 263.
- Hodkinson, P. and Sparkes, A. C. (1997) Careership: a sociological theory of career decision making *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 18. 1, 29 - 45.
- Holland, J. L. (1973) *Making vocational choices: a theory of careers.*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
- Holliday, A. (2002) *Doing and writing qualitative research*, Sage Publications, London.



- Hutchings, M. and Archer, L. (2001) 'Higher than Einstein': constructions of going to university among working class non-participants *Research Papers in Education*, 16. 1, 69 - 91.
- ICG (2004) *Graduate Salaries Buoyant*, Careers Adviser,
- James, D. (1998a) *Bourdieu and Education: Acts of practical theory* (Eds, James, D. and Grenfell, M.) Falmer Press, London.
- James, D. (1998b) *Higher Education Field-work: The Interdependence of Teaching Research and Student Experience In Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory*, Vol. (Eds, Grenfell, M. and James, D.) Falmer Press, London, pp. 104 - 120.
- Jenkins, R. (2002) *Pierre Bourdieu*, Routledge, London.
- Kanter, R. M. (1995) *World Class: Thriving Locally in the Global Economy*, Simon & Schuster, New York.
- Kelly, J. (2004) *Cold-spot scheme warms to success*, Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 27/2/04
- Kelsey, J. (1999) *Beyond Fragments Studies in Continuing Education*, 21. 2.
- Kennedy (1997) "Learning Works" - *The report of the Further Education Funding Council's committee on widening participation in Further Education, chaired by Baroness Kennedy of the Shaws*, DfEE, London. 1997
- Killeen, J. (1996) *Career Theory In Rethinking career education and guidance: theory, policy and practice*, Vol. (Eds, Watts, A. G., Law, B., Killeen, J., Kidd, J. M. and Hawthorn, R.) Routledge, London, pp. 23-46.
- Krueger, R. A. and Casey, M. A. (2000) *Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research*, Sage Publications Inc., London.
- Krumboltz, J. D. (1994) The career beliefs inventory *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 72. 424 - 428.
- Krumboltz, J. D. (1998) Counsellor actions needed for the new career perspective *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 26. 4, 559 - 561.
- Krumboltz, J. D., Mitchell, K. E. and Levin, A. S. (1999) Planned happenstance: constructing unexpected career opportunities *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 77. 2, 115 - 125.

- Law, B. (1999) Career-learning space: new-DOTS thinking for careers education *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 27. 1, 35 - 55.
- Law, B. (2003a) *Developing Portfolios*, The career learning network,
- Law, B. (2003b) *Diagnosing career learning needs - a professional guide to principles and practice*, The career learning network, 2003
- Law, B. (2003c) *What is career work and where is it going?*, The career learning network, 2003
- Law, B., Meijers, F. and Wijers, G. (2002) New perspectives on career and identity in the contemporary world *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 30. 4, 431 - 449.
- Layer, G. (2003) *Widening participation and employability*, ESECT, London. 2003
- Layer, G. (Ed.) (2004) *Widening participation and employability*, Learning and Teaching Support Network, York.
- Leathwood, C. and O'Connell, P. (2003) 'It's a struggle': the construction of the 'new student' in higher education *Journal of Education Policy*, 18. 6, 597 - 615.
- LeCompte, M. D. and Schensul, J. J. (1999) *Designing and conducting ethnographic research*, AltaMira Press, California.
- Lee, S. (1999) *Widening participation: discussion document to assist the formulation of College strategy (first draft)*, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool. 1999
- Lee, S. (2001) *Hope for widening participation*, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool. 2001
- LHUC (1999a) *Reach Out and its different elements*, Hope Direct, Winter 1999,
- LHUC (1999b) *Undergraduate Prospectus*, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool. 1999b
- LHUC (2000) *Widening Participation - Discussion document to assist the formation of College strategy (first draft)*, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool. 2000
- LHUC (2003) *Career Development: Annual Report*, Liverpool Hope University College, Liverpool. 2003



- Longden, B. (2003a) In *Personal and Professional Development* Liverpool Hope University College.
- Longden, B. (2003b) *Widening Participation in Higher Education In The Foundation of Hope - Turning Dreams into Reality*, Vol. (Ed, Elford, J.) Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, pp. 50 - 63.
- Lovell, T. (2002) Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu *Femist Theory*, 1. 1, 11 - 32.
- LSC (2003) *Skills in England - Volume 2, Learning and Skills Council*, Warwick. 2003
- Luzzo, D. A. (1999) Identifying the career decision-making needs of non-traditional college students *Journal of Counselling & Development*, 77. 2, 135 - 141.
- M.E.R. (2003) *The Merseyside Economic Review, 2003*, The Mersey Partnership & English Partnerships, Liverpool. 2003
- M.E.R. (2004) *Merseyside Economic Review 2004: Summary*, Mersey Partnership, Liverpool. 2004
- Macleod, D. (2003a) *Keep them coming*, The Guardian, London, 14/10/03
- Macleod, D. (2003b) *National drop-out rates fall but fail to improve in London*, The Guardian, London, 11/12/03
- Maguire, S. (2001) Teaching geography to non-traditional students: inducting, nurturing and retaining them *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 23. 2, 233 - 240.
- Mail, W. (2004) *'Glut of graduates' worry as work profiles look bleak*, The Western Mail, 30/03/04
- Marks, A. (1999) Taking the water to the horse: are traditional universities doing all they can to attract adult learners? *Adults learning*, 10. 7, 11 - 14.
- Marks, A. (2000) Lifelong learning and the 'breadwinner ideology': addressing the problems of lack of participation by adult working class males in higher education on Merseyside *Educational Studies*, 26. 3, 303.
- Marshall, P. (1997) Adult students in higher education *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 25. 3, 421.

- Mayrhofer, W., Strunk, G., Schuffinger, M., Iellatchitch, A., Streyrer, J. and Meyer, M. (2002) In *Academy of Management Annual Conference, 9 - 14 August, 2002* Vienna University of Business Administration, Vienna.
- Metcalf, H. (1997) *Class and higher education: the participation of young people from lower social classes*, 1997
- Mohanty, S. P. (2003) *The epistemic status of cultural identity* In *Identities*, Vol. (Eds, Martin Alcoff, L. and Mendieta, E.) Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, pp. 392 - 405.
- Moreland, N. (2003) *Briefing Paper: Entrepreneurialism (Draft One)*, ESECT, London. 2003
- MORI (2003) *Careers information and careers planning 2003 - a survey of degree finalists*, MORI, 2003
- MSEI (2004) *What is Social Enterprise?*, Report on Merseyside Social Enterprise Initiative, Liverpool. 2004
- N.C.I.H.E. (1997) *Higher Education in the Learning Society (The 'Dearing' Report)*, H.M.S.O., London. 1997
- Nash, R. (1996) Bourdieu: Habitus and educational research: is it all worth the candle? *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 11. 4, 431 - 448.
- NCIHE (1998) *"Higher Education in the Learning Society" Report by the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education*, Department for Education and Employment, London. 1998
- O.E.C.D. (2003) *OECD Review of Career Guidance Policies*, Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development, 2003
- O.N.S. (2001) Office for National Statistics.
- O.N.S. (2002) *Regional, sub-regional and local area household income*, National Statistics, London. 2002
- Offer, M. and Madahar, L. (2004) *Managing e-guidance interventions within HE careers services: a new approach to providing guidance at a distance*, Higher Education Careers Service Unit, Manchester. 2004
- Offer, M., Sampson, J. P. and Watts, A. G. (2001) *Careers Services: Technology and the Future*, NICEC, Manchester. 2001



- Osborne, M., Marks, A. and Turner, E. (2004) Becoming a mature student: How adult participants weigh the advantages and disadvantages of higher education *Higher Education*, 48. 3, 291 - 314.
- Perrone, L. and Vickers, M. H. (2003) Life after graduation as a 'very uncomfortable world': an Australian case study *Education & Training*, 45. 2, 69 - 78.
- Prospects (2004) *Graduate Market Trends*, Graduate Prospects, Manchester. 2004
- Purcell, K. and Elias, P. (2004) *Seven Years On: Graduate Careers in a Changing Labour Market*, Institute for Employment Research, Warwick. 2004
- Purcell, K., Morley, M. and Rowley, G. (2002) *Recruiting from a wider spectrum of graduates*, 2002
- Purcell, K. and Pitcher, J. (1996) *Great Expectations: the new diversity of graduate skills and aspirations*, University of Warwick, 1996
- Purcell, K., Pitcher, J. and Simm, C. (1999) *Working Out? Graduates' early experiences of the labour market*, 1999
- Purcell, K. and Rowley, G. (2000) *Higher education careers services and graduate guidance needs: the evidence from surveys of users*, Employment Studies Research Unit, Bristol. 2000
- Read, B., Archer, L. and Leathwood, C. (2003) Challenging Cultures? Student Conceptions of 'Belonging' and 'Isolation' at a Post-1992 University *Studies in Higher Education*, 28. 3, 261 - 277.
- Reay, D. (1995) 'They employ cleaners to do that': Habitus in the primary classroom *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 16. 3, 353 - 372.
- Reay, D. (1998a) 'Always knowing' and 'never being sure': familial and institutional habituses had higher education choice *Journal of Education Policy*, 13. 519 - 529.
- Reay, D. (1998b) *Cultural Reproduction: Mothers Involvement in Their Children's Primary Schooling In Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory*, Vol. (Eds, Grenfell, M. and James, D.) Falmer Press, London.

- Reay, D. and Ball, S. J. (1997) 'Spoilt for choice': The working classes and educational markets *Oxford Review of Education*, 23. 1, 89 - 102.
- Reay, D., Ball, S. J. and David, M. (2002) It's taking me a long time but I'll get there in the end: Mature students on access courses and higher education choice *British Educational Research Journal*, 28. 1, 5 - 19.
- Redmond, P. (2004: awaiting publication) *What did Rita do next? Social class and graduate employment* In *Hobsons' Guide to Higher Education*, Vol. (Ed, Spearman, E.) Hobsons, London.
- Redmond, P. M. (2003) 'I just thought it was for people with loads of money:' *Experiences and aspirations of widening participation students*, Learning and Teaching Support Network, London. 2003
- Rifkin, J. (1996) *The end of work*, Tarcher / Putnam, New York.
- Rifkin, J. (2000) *The age of access: how the shift from ownership to access is transforming modern life*, Penguin Books, London.
- Rigano, D. L. and Ritchie, S. M. (2001) Researcher-participant positioning in classroom research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 14. 6, 741.
- Robbins, D. (1993) The practical importance of Bourdieu's analyses of higher education.
- Roberts, K. (1997) Prolonged transitions to uncertain destinations: the implications for careers guidance *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 25. 3, 345 - 359.
- Robson, C. (1993) *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner Researchers*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- Rowley, G. and Purcell, K. (2001) Up to the Job? Graduates' Perceptions of the UK Higher Education Careers Service *Higher Education Quarterly*, 55. 4, 416 - 435.
- Scheuer, J. (2003) Habitus as the principle for social practice: A proposal for critical discourse analysis *Language in Society*, 32. 143 - 175.
- Shacklock, G. and Smyth, J. (Eds.) (1998) *Being Reflexive in Critical Educational and Social Research*, Falmer Press, London.



- Silverman, D. (2001) *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction*, Sage Publications Ltd, London.
- Slowey, M. (2000) *Redefining the non-traditional student: equity and lifelong learning in British higher education, 1985 - 2000* In *Higher Education and Lifelong Learners*, Vol. (Eds, Schuetze, G. H. and Slowey, M.) Routledge - Falmer, London, pp. 101 - 124.
- Smith, S. (2003) *What an education did for Rita*, THES, London, 5/12/03
- Stake, R. E. (1995) *The Art of Case Study Research*, Sage Publications Inc, London.
- Sunday-Times (2003) *Sunday Times University Guide 2003*, Sunday Times, London, 14/9/03
- Super, D. E. (1957) *The Psychology of Careers*, Harper & Row, New York.
- Teichler, U. (1998) The Transition from Higher Education to Employment in Europe *Higher Education in Europe*, 23. 4, 535 - 558.
- Teichler, U. (1999) Research on the relationships between higher education and the world of work: Past achievements, problems and the new challenges *Higher Education*, 38. 169 - 190.
- Teichler, U. (2000) Graduate Employment and Work in Selected European Countries *European Journal in Education*, 35. 2, 141 - 156.
- Tett, L. (1999) Widening provision in higher education - some non-traditional participants' experiences *Research Papers in Education*, 14. 1, 107 - 119.
- Tett, L. (2000) 'I'm working class and proud of it' - Gendered experiences of non-traditional participants in higher education *Gender & Education*, 12. 2.
- Thomas, L. (2002), Vol. 2004 Action on Access.
- Thomson, A. and Sanders, C. (2003) *£2.3 bn fails to buy off critics*, The Times Higher Education Supplement, London,

- Tight, M. (1998) Education, Education, Education! The vision of lifelong learning in the Kennedy, Dearing *Oxford Review of Education*, 24. 4, 473 - 485.
- Tight, M. (2003) *Researching Higher Education*, SRHE and Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Times, S. (2001) *Liverpool Hope University College*, Sunday Times, London, 16/9/01
- Tonks, D. and Farr, M. (2003) Widening access and participation in UK higher education *The International Journal of Educational Management*, 17. 1, 26 - 36.
- Turok, I. and Edge, N. (1999) *The jobs gap in Britain's cities: employment loss and labour market consequences*, Joseph Rowntree Trust, London. 1999
- Tysome, T. (1997) *Careers service overhaul urged*, Times Higher Education Supplement, London, 20/6/97
- Tysome, T. (2003) *Man united praised for career counselling*, THES, London, 03/9/03
- Universum (2002a) *University Report- Pan-European Edition Università Cattolica Milano del Sacre Cuore, Stockholm, Universum, Universum, Stockholm. 2002a*
- Universum (2002b) *The Universum Graduate Survey 2002 University Report— Pan-European Edition Università Cattolica Milano del Sacre Cuore COMMUNICATIONS, Universum, Milan. 2002b*
- UUK (2004), Vol. 2004 Universities UK.
- Wakeford, N. (1993) Beyond Educating Rita: mature students and access courses *Oxford Review of Education*, 19. 2, 217.
- Wallace, M. (2003) *A Disconcerting Brevity: Pierre Bourdieu's Masculine Domination*, University of Manitoba, Manitoba. 2003
- Warhurst, C. and Nickson, D. (2001) *Looking good, sounding right. Style counselling in the new economy*, The Industrial Society., London.
- Warrington, P. (2003) 'You need a qualification for everything these days'. The impact of work, welfare and disaffection upon the



- aspirations of access to Higher Education students *British Journal of Sociology in Education*, 24. 1, 96-108.
- Watts, A. (1996a) The death and transfiguration of career - and of career guidance? *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 24. 3, 385 - 394.
- Watts, A., Hughes, D. and Haslam, D. (1999) *Closer Working? A review of working relationships between careers service organisations and higher education careers advisory services*, University of Derby, Centre for Guidance Studies.
- Watts, A. G. (1996b) *Careerquake*, Demos, London.
- Watts, A. G. (1996c) *Careers work in higher education* In *Rethinking careers education and guidance: theory, policy and practice*, Vol. (Eds, Watts, A. G., Law, B., Killeen, J., Kidd, J. M. and Hawthorn, R.) Routledge, London.
- Watts, A. G. (1997a) Developing local lifelong guidance strategies *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 25. 2.
- Watts, A. G. (1997b) *Strategic Directions for Careers Services in Higher Education*, Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services, Cambridge.
- Watts, A. G. (2001) Career guidance and social exclusion: a cautionary tale *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 29. 2.
- Watts, A. G. and Kidd, J. M. (1978) Evaluating the effectiveness of careers guidance: A review of the British research *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 51. 235 - 248.
- Webb, J., Schirato, T. and Danaher, G. (2002) *Understanding Bourdieu*, Sage, London.
- West, L. (1995) Beyond fragments: adults, motivation and higher education *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 27. 2, 133.
- West, L. (1996) *Beyond Fragments: adults, motivation and higher education*, Taylor & Francis, London.
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (2002) *Methods of critical discourse analysis*, Sage, London.
- Woodrow, M. (2000) *Widening Participation: What's it really all about?*, Action on Access, 2000

**Youell, A. (2003) *Students Entering Higher Education institutions with Access Qualifications 2001/02*, Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA), London. 2003**